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THE POOR PARSON



LIZZIE HEAVED THE CONTENTS OF THE BUCKET.

The Poor Parson.

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THE POOR PARSON

BY

STEELE RUDD

(A. H. DAVIS),

AUTHOR OF "On Our Selection;" "Our New Selection;"
"Sandy's Selection;" "Back at Our Selection."

*With Twenty-two full-page Illustrations by
Syd. Smith & Harry Julius.*

SYDNEY

N.S.W. BOOKSTALL CO.

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INTRODUCTION

S. R. CROCKETT has charmed us, in guid braid Galloway Scots, with the humour and pathos of the Marrow Kirk of Scotland; Ralph Connor has told us of the Sky Pilot amid the gullies and mining camps of Canada's Far West. Can Australia not step into line and show us that she, too, has her men of quiet devotion, who, without the halo set round the head of the Foreign Missionary, are living in the Never-never country reminding the scattered world of the bush that "man does not live by bread alone?" The answer to that question lies before you. Steele Rudd needs no introduction. He has won his place in the native literature, which is happily growing up, by his vivid pictures of the pioneer life of the lonely settler. Australia is not known to the visitor who steams up "our beautiful harbour," or who gazes with admiration on the architectural symmetry of the General Post Office. City life is much the same in England and Australia. The real life of our country cannot be described by the man who knows only the irritating ring of the telephone bell, but not the crack of the stockman's whip. Steele Rudd knows his Australia, that back-country where individuality is not crushed into a common mould, and in the following pages he has painted that life

as it is. The "Poor Parson" does not happen to be his own particular Parson, but that one thanks him for so gently dealing with his brethren who, amid many discouragements and hardships uncomplainingly borne, labours to sweeten and soften the hardness of life and to bring to men the refining influence of higher things. Yesterday's post brought me a letter from just such a man who, in no spirit of complaint, writes: *I have turned over the sulky in a night drive, I have got lost in the bush, I have broken every part of the harness at different times and my horse has bolted with me more than once; but that is all in the day's work. What does concern me is that, with the strictest economy, I cannot make ends meet and my little wife is sorely in need of a change from this trying climate.*" May he soon have a visit from the burly McClure, whose big heart outweighs the spontaneity of his speech! Wherever Bailey is to be found the Church Committee should present him with a copy of "The Poor Parson" as a suitable expression of their appreciation of his work for the Church.

RONALD G. MACINTYRE.

THE MANSE,

WOOLLAHRA,

6TH NOVEMBER, 1907.

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CHAPTER I.

Narralane.

FOR many years the inhabitants of Narralane were wild and rough and irreverent. They never said prayers nor grace, and never went to church. They never knew any prayers nor grace to say, and never had a church to go to. When they weren't working on Sundays they were cutting each other's hair, or making greenhide leg-ropes, or breaking in horses. And hair was cut regularly in those days, and horses well broken.

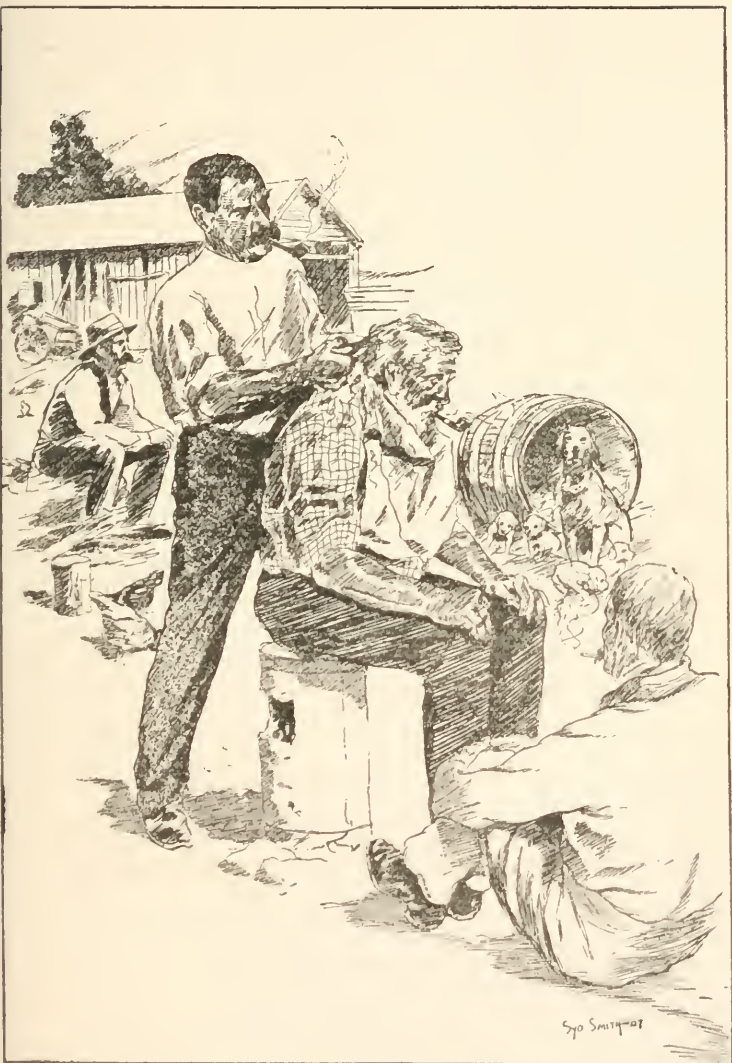
But everything has changed since then. Now it is lawless and wicked to do anything round Narralane on Sunday except milk cows and go to church. And a fine church they have to go to, too. Years and years it took to build it—at least it took years to get the people to decide upon building it, and it took many more years to gather in all the money promised towards it. McClure's contribution was the hardest of all to gather in. McClure wasn't a man to give quickly to a church. For a long while he could never see anything in a church. A new culvert or a factory he could understand, but a church was beyond him.

“What’s the guid o’ it?” he would say! “it’s nae use—you can put naething in it.”

But when, after a lot of persistence, he was finally induced to subscribe five pounds towards the building fund, McClure became enthusiastic. He attended the meetings, and hastened operations. He seemed afraid that the committee would disappear in the night, and take the building fund with them, and couldn’t rest until the timber was on the ground, and the carpenters’ hammers going. But when the building was up, McClure went cold on church matters again, and wasn’t heard of any more until one day McIntyre and McGregor came along with a new subscription list, and asked for something towards the minister’s stipend. Then McClure was heard all over several paddocks.

“All these have put their names down for something, Mr. McClure,” McIntyre said, in a conciliatory tone, and read the list out. “We only want sixty pounds subscribed altogether, and the minister will come to the church, and preach for us every month. The rest of his stipend, £120 a year altogether, will be paid by the Springfield congregation.”

“Confoond it, then! *There!*” McClure bellowed angrily, throwing a pound note down hard on the table. “*There!* and don’t come near me ony mair wi’ your stipends an’ your preachin’.”



"THEY WERE CUTTING EACH OTHER'S HAIR."

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McIntyre and McGregor thanked McClure, and went away smiling.

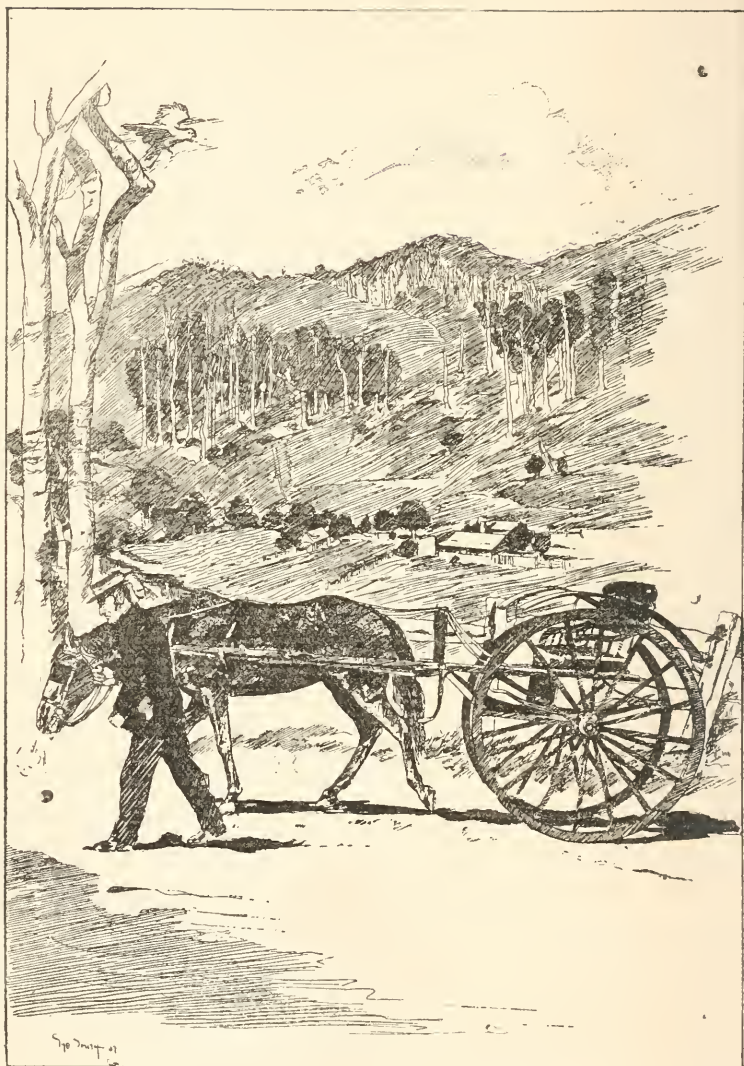
The minister arrived one Sunday, and preached his opening sermon, and made a good impression on his congregation. They were all delighted with him, and, at the close of the service, gathered round him. Mothers who thought he looked like a single man introduced their big daughters to him and invited him to their homes. The men lifted their hats and stared reverently upon him, and went and put the harness on his horse, and yoked the animal to the rickety little sulky for him. And when he drove away they stared longingly after him, and said he was a good man.

All through the week the congregation talked of the minister, and recalled parts of his sermon, and solemnly agreed that his interpretations of the Scriptures were the real ones. And they eagerly looked forward to his visit the following month, and the month after. And when he began to call at their homes on week days, they left their work to welcome him; made tea for him, too, and pressed him to stay all night with them. In a while he became part of the district, and could never be done without. No event or gathering of any description was complete without his presence. And the congregation were for ever sending for him, and carting him round the country. When it wasn't

to perform a marriage they required him, it was to christen somebody's baby, or to read the burial service over someone who had died without giving them any warning. And no matter what kind of weather it was—whether fog, hail, or mud up to the axles—he was expected to come along to time just the same, and to wear a look of happiness or sympathy as the case might require.

Ah, it was hard on the poor parson! Harder sometimes than camping out in the wet, or putting corn in with a hoe. And his rounds were never ended. For fifteen, twenty, and thirty miles he would have to urge his lean, jaded horse along over roads that ran into ugly creeks and dark gullies, and up the sides of mountain ranges. And sometimes the animal would knock up, and the parson would sigh and get out of the trap and lead him, or leave him by the roadside, and walk on alone with his Bible under his arm.

Often, too, his wife would be in delicate health, and his two younger children in the throes of whooping-cough, and he would have to take them all with him in the sulky, and put them up at the rude habitations of some of his congregation—perhaps at one place one night and at another the next, where they were served liberally with salt junk and pumpkin for supper and the same for breakfast, while a number of bags would be spread on the beds for blankets



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“THE PARSON WOULD SIGH AND LEAD HIM.”

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Ah, yes, the poor parson's lot at Narralane was not an enviable one. No one cared to exchange jobs with *him*.

"The poor soul!" some outsiders used to say when remarking on his wan and worn features, "they're workin' him quite poor."

But in due course the minister got to know and to understand his congregation, and knew exactly what was required of him. No matter whose christening or wedding it was—or whether it was Mr. and Mrs. Grey's health he was proposing, or old Regan (the cattle stealer) and his wife's, he was expected to praise them up just the same; and he *would* praise them up, and make out they were held in the highest esteem by everyone in the district, and would talk of them as "big-hearted" and "hospitable" and "honest." Oh! the perjury the minister had to commit sometimes to keep his billet was a terrible reflection on the new church. It was enough to cause a curse to settle on it for all time.



CHAPTER II.

The Parson Gets into Debt.

TWELVE months passed. The congregation didn't think so much of the minister now. They hadn't any gratitude left for him at all. His sermons, they thought, weren't nearly so good as they used to be, and they said his wife was proud and stuck up. And when Mrs. McStraw found out through a relation that she had been a Methodist before she had married the minister, they couldn't suffer her any more, and couldn't forgive the minister either for marrying her. Mrs. McGregor, too, complained bitterly about him. She told everyone that he had said a lot of nasty things at her place about the Andersons—things that a minister had no right to say about anyone. And when the Andersons heard about it, they left the church.

Several months went past, and the congregation became more and more dissatisfied, and many of them became irregular attendants at the services. The Galbraiths, who lived in a mountain gorge, about twenty miles away, took

umbrage because the minister omitted to call on them the night he walked twelve miles to bury Mrs. Tomkins, and administer solace when their haystacks got burnt down, and withdrew altogether.

But the last straw was added to the congregation's burden of dissatisfaction when word came from Springfield that the minister owed Bailey, the storekeeper, twenty-five pounds, and wasn't able to pay any of it. Everyone said it was disgraceful. They called it a "downright shame." McGregor shook his head, and said he must be "a mon wi' no honour," and demanded a meeting be held right away to ask him to resign.

The majority of the congregation agreed with McGregor, and in due course a meeting was called at which the minister was invited to be present, but he could not attend. He was sent for the same evening to visit a person who was dying at Cattle Creek, twenty-five miles away. But his wife attended.

McGregor, who presided, said he was sorry the reverend gentleman didn't have the courage to face the meeting, and the audience stamped its feet, and said "Hear, hear," and turned their faces in triumph to the minister's wife, who started to cry. Then he made hostile remarks about the minister's indebtedness to Bailey, the grocer, and said it rested with the meeting to take action. The minister's wife

rose in the body of the church, and her eyes flashed. She pointed her finger at them, and in loud, dramatic tones said:

“It is *you* who are indebted to *him*. You have not paid him his stipend.”

Then she broke down.

There was a silence.

McClure rose then, and cleared his throat and went into figures. He was always a great man for figures. He asked the chairman what the minister’s stipend amounted to. The chairman didn’t know. He leaned over, and asked McIntyre, and McIntyre referred to the secretary. The secretary opened a book, and turned some loose leaves over, and said it was sixty pounds.

“Sixty pounds,” McClure echoed; “and hasna he been paid it reg’lar?”

There was a pause, during which everyone looked anxiously at the secretary, who kept turning over more leaves.

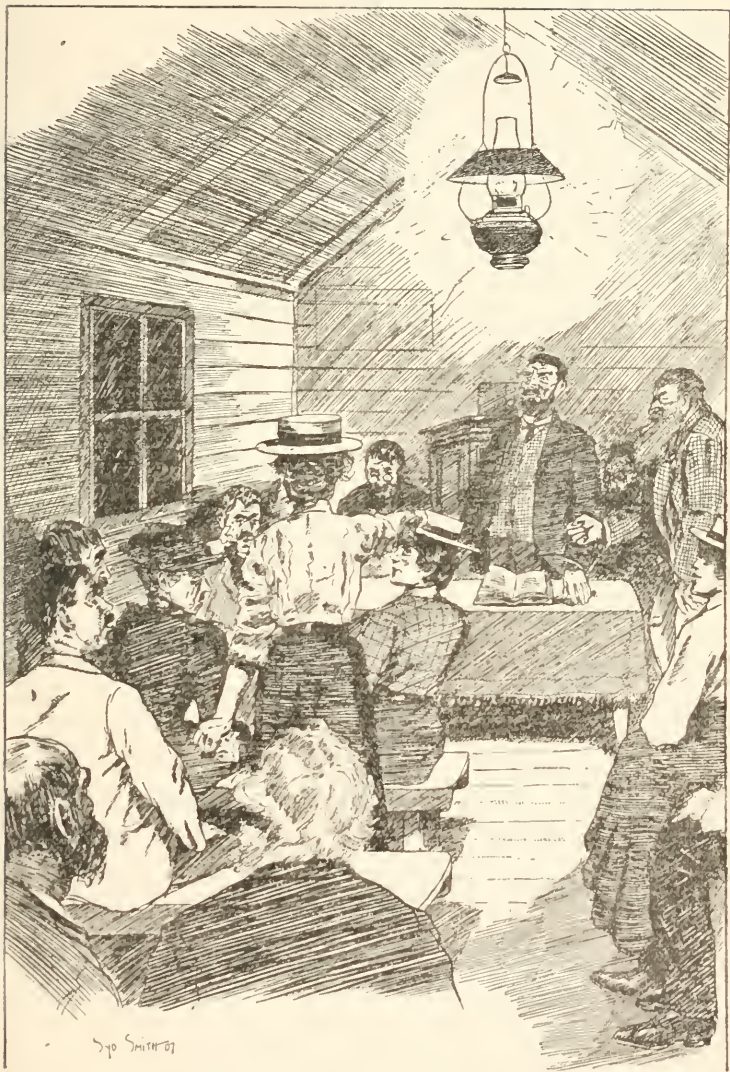
“Hasna he been paid it reg’lar?” McClure yelled, with emphasis.

The secretary said he thought not.

“Hasna he been paid ony o’ it, then?” McClure bel-lowed angrily.

There was another pause.

“Five pounds he got last June,” the secretary stam-



"IT IS YOU WHO ARE INDEBTED TO 'HIM.'"

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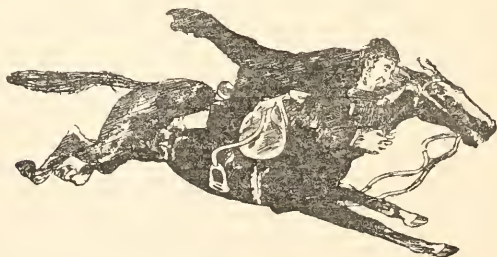
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mered, "and two pounds two in May makes seven pounds two. He couldn't get any more because all those who put their names down haven't paid up yet."

"Haven't paid?" McClure howled. "And you expectit the man to pay his debts when you don't pay him his salary? What kind of men are ye at a'? Why it is yer-sels that are in debt! Is that the way to run a kirk? Is it the way, think ye, tae run a fowl hoose? Shame on you!"

Most of the meeting arose and went out dejectedly.

Then McClure handed the minister's wife a cheque for £25 and she burst into tears again, and hid her face in her hands. And the meeting closed.



CHAPTER III.

Racing and Chasing.

FOR several weeks after holding their meeting to call upon the minister to resign, the congregation at Narralane seemed ashamed of themselves, and used to avoid their pastor. Whenever they saw his familiar form coming along the lanes, on horseback, they would hide themselves in the tall corn, and dodge behind haystacks, or disappear into the gullies, every one of them. But their minister had no grudge against any of them, and bore no malice. He met them in their homes with an encouraging smile, and extended his soft, white hand to them. And when any of them ventured a clumsy apology, he told them it didn't matter; asked them not to think of it again, and was sure the incident would only help them to understand him better. Encouraged thus by his kindly, Christian attitude, each of them in turn proceeded to put all the blame on those who were absent, and assured the minister that if they had "only known at the time," they would not have done this, that, or

the other; and committed a lot more perjury. Then they entered into church matters with more zeal than ever, and made reckless suggestions to the minister about promoting bazaars or purchasing a small organ, or decorating the interior of the church on thanksgiving services, and showed much eagerness to do anything and everything that might please and encourage the minister.

And when the poor parson would take his leave, they would stand at their doors and watch him go away, and say "he wasn't such a bad chap after all."

.

Church Sunday. Milking was just finished at "Loch Ness," Duncan McClure's farm, and Duncan, the short, thick, big-waisted, big-hearted, fat-fisted, happy-go-lucky Scot, with a lot of humour in his blue eyes, strolled leisurely about the yard whistling snatches of the Highland Fling, and yelling out orders to the boys about the cows and the milk pails.

"An', Peter," he concluded, "there's gaun to be sair-vice at the kirk the day, so when you've had a mouthful o' grub you'd better tak' the broon mere, and go and meet the pairrson at Springfield, and bring the auld chap back wi' you."

The boys laughed.

"He's got nae horse o' his ain noo, ye ken," Duncan

went on; "he rode it, so Billy Bacon was tellin' me, till it just laid doon under him ae day, and dee'd."

The boys laughed more, and Peter said:

"But don't you think the mare would be a bit too flash for him?"

"Oh, be th' wars, no, Peter," the parent answered: "pairrsons are great riders, ye ken."

More merriment from the boys; and Duncan, with a broad smile on his hairy, genial face, added roguishly:

"Wouldn't it be a gran' larrk, though, to see her buck th' auld chap aff in that lang black coat he wears when he's marryin' folk, wouldn't it, Peter?"

And having provoked another round of hilarity from his offspring, Duncan turned and waddled off to breakfast; and when his wife inquired from him "if the boys were coming," he smiled and said:

"They're up there at the yairrd, Vi., laughin' like th' very deil at the auld pairrson."

Afternoon. The half-acre yard that enclosed the little country church, standing off the main road, was formed into a hollow square of horses of all sorts and stamps. There was an animal of some kind or other fastened to every post and to every panel; some with harness on, some with men's saddles on, and some with nothing but long hair and sweat .

marks on. Under a few straggly gum trees, that shaded one corner of the ground, a few sulkies and a buggy were standing with the shafts resting on the fence for protection.

In the scant shade of the crude, weatherboard building, the congregation were gathered in wait for the minister. The women, with their umbrellas raised, and Bibles in their hands, stood round in small groups, asking after each other's health, and recounting the difficulties they had had during the week, which had been a wet one, in getting their washing dry. The men sat on their heels, their backs to the wall of the building, beating the flies off, and occasionally greeting a new arrival with "Hello," and the new arrival would say "Hello," too, and wedge himself in amongst them, and squeeze someone else out into the sun. Now and again they would exhibit signs of impatience, and drawl, "Time 'e was comin'."

McClure, who had been poking about inside the church, dusting the pulpit and arranging the seats, came out bare-headed, his big hands buried deep in the pockets of his capacious trousers, and displaying a large, ill-fitting tweed coat that buttoned up close to his collarless neck and fell like a cloak over his tremendous corporation, and solemnly approached the others.

"Day, Duncan," they said, and smiled. (They always smiled when they said "good day" to Duncan.)

“Good-day, chaps,” Duncan answered, in a loud voice, and leaning well back, as was his habit, and, looking down over his stomach at them, added, “Are y’ rready to have your sins seen to?”

They grinned and chuckled alternately.

“Weel, the auld boy ought to be here sune,” and Duncan inserted his fat fist in the recesses of his great coat, and extracted a large family watch of rare and ancient pattern, which he considered long and earnestly.

The others continued to grin.

“Well, that’s a rum thing,” he said, putting the “turnip” to his woolly ear, “th’ bloomin’ wheels o’t are gaun roon just like a corn-sheller, an’ I’m hanged if th’ han’s has shifted sin’ I cleant masel!”

The others broke into a loud laugh, but were interrupted by Henry Thompson bounding suddenly to his feet, and exclaiming, excitedly :

“Look here! Save us—look! look! the *Parson!*”

Every man of them jumped up, and looked. The women lowered their umbrellas, and looked too. The medley of horses forming the hollow square elevated their heads, pricked their ears and became restless, and threatened to break their bridles.

“His horse is bolting with him!” some cried, and all rushed for positions at the fence to see what was the matter.

“An’ it’s my mare, tae!” Duncan cried, “an’ she’s a deil to haud. Lord, jist look at th’ auld boy comin’ it!”

The women set up a chorus of screams, as the mare approached at racing speed, with the parson clinging round her neck, his hat gone, and his trousers working up till his white shins were showing like rolls of paper.

“Peter’s ridin’ to catch him, and he can’t draw on him,” some more called out, and the next moment the bay mare flashed past the church like a cup winner, and old Hamilton’s buggy horse broke from his moorings, and careered round the enclosure with the harness hanging to him. Peter, using whip and spur to overtake his charge, drew level with the church, and the spectators yelled to him to know what had happened.

“Goanner on ’im,” was all they heard, and Peter shot past like a cup loser.

“There’s a goanner on him,” Jimmy Brown yelled, excitedly, “a bloomin’ goanner!”

And a dozen other voices declared they “saw it—saw it stickin’ to the mare’s rump.” Then a wild rush took place for saddle horses, and the next moment most of the congregation were spurring their mounts through the open gate, and racing up the road in hot pursuit of the parson and Peter.

Spencer



WITH THE PARSON CLINGING ROUND HER NECK.

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“Crikey, can’t the auld boy stick?” Duncan said, turning with simple admiration to the excited females.

“*I couldna ha’ stuek like him!*”

Some of the women looked with amusement at Duncan, and some of them, thinking of the minister, murmured: “The poor man will be killed.”

“Naethin’ can vera weel happen him,” Duncan added; “he’s a life-savin’ apparatus himsel’, y’ ken.”

But Duncan was not a good prophet. Something did happen. The poor parson parted with the mare at Hanley’s fence, and was carried back to the church by Bailey, the storekeeper, and three or four others, in an unconscious condition.

The congregation gathered round his prostrate form with looks of sorrow and alarm on their faces. The women wept and prayed hysterically for his recovery. The men argued as to what was the best thing to do, and a half-dozen of them raced off in different directions on the same errand.

“I wudna gie him whusky,” Duncan said, in solemn protest, when one of the messengers returned, and handed Bailey a bottle. Bailey said it was the best thing to give an injured man, and was supported by Mrs. Bailey and several others.

“But he’s stric’ teetotal,” Duncan answered, “an’ if

y' gie him whusky when he canna decide for himsel', he'll be in a deil o' a rage wi' us a' when he comes roon!"

But Bailey was a strong man, and proceeded to have his way.

"Weel, then," Dunean added, withdrawing his protest, "if you're gaun to gie him ony at a', gie him a guid skinfu'."

Bailey administered the liquor in moderation, and the minister, after a while, opened his eyes and looked around, and a heavy load of anxiety was lifted from the minds of those attending. They chafed his hands and looked into his face, and inquired if he were hurt, and if he felt better. Soon, however, he was able to raise himself, and they placed him gently in the bottom of a buggy. And while Peter McClure explained to the wondering crowd how a large "goanner" that he, Peter, had taken by the tail and dragged off a gate post, fell to the ground and ran blindly up the mare's leg, and started her bolting, the poor parson was driven off to McIntyre's place, and ministered to.



CHAPTER IV.

The Twelve Sovereigns.

FOR several weeks the minister was unable to leave his house, and church work at Narralane fell into arrears. So did the minister's grocery bill at Bailey's store.

"This is a good season, you know, Duncan," Bailey said to McClure one day at the factory, "and I think something should be done to relieve the parson. He's had bad luck—very bad luck—and between ourselves, and I wouldn't say it to anyone but yourself, I know he's in need of a little help. Do you understand me?"

"I understan' weel," Duncan replied, "fer I was thinkin' aboot him the day, and I thocht it would be a Christian-like thing if a few sovereigns were colleckit and gi'en to him."

Bailey said that that was what he was going to suggest.

"Very weel, then," Duncan added. "I'll see Brown and Bennet aboot it th' morn."

Duncan saw Brown and Bennet, and a subscription was

started right away, and Bailey was made treasurer of the fund.

An energetic canvass was also made throughout the district; the hearts of the church people responded, and in a short time a sum of £12 was collected for the poor parson. Duncan and Bailey were delighted—especially Bailey—and they decided to hold a gathering of those who subscribed and make the presentation to the minister a happy and memorable event.

A date was fixed, and it was a great occasion. The little church was packed with sympathisers, and several tables were laden with cakes and gingerbeer, and elaborately decorated with ferns and flowers. Bailey was nominated spokesman, and he rose and enumerated all the minister's good qualities, and, at the conclusion of his remarks, stepped forward, and handed the purse to him, saying:

“I have much pleasure, Mr. McCulloch, in handing you a purse of sovereigns subscribed by everyone here this evening.”

The parson received the surprise of his life. His breath was taken completely away, and, when he rose to thank them for the kindly gift, the tears trickled down his cheeks, and his voice filled with genuine emotion.

“I can assure you all,” he said, “that it comes at a most opportune moment—at a moment when it is much needed,

and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your goodness and generosity.”

Then he put the purse carefully away in his breast pocket, and when he reached home, after driving eight miles in the dark, across a broad and lonely plain, he hastened to his bedroom to break the cheerful tidings to his wife.

“Twelve sovereigns for me, Jean,” he said excitedly, emptying the contents into her open hand, “twelve sovereigns.”

His wife started to smile. “Really, Donald?” she said. Then her features underwent a sudden change. So did the poor parson’s.

Some silver and a receipted bill of Bailey’s for £11 15s. were in the purse, but no sovereigns. For a moment their eyes met in silence. Then—

“*May the Lord forgive him, Jean,*” the poor parson said, and sank low into a chair.



CHAPTER V.

Bill Eaglefoot Visits the Manse.

THE place in which the poor parson and his family lived at Springfield was not a grand habitation.

Everyone called it "The Manse." Why they called it "The Manse" none of them seemed to know. It was a poky, tumbledown old rookery of four small rooms, a verandah, and a skillion, roofed over with shingles, out of which the very nails had long since rotted and rolled into the spouting. The people about Springfield preferred a shingle roof to any kind; they said shingle roofs looked better than any others, and were a lot cooler. But no living person, except old McAdam, who was ninety-one years of age, and Grannie Anderson, who was ninety-two, could remember having seen any of the shingles on "The Manse." A vigorous green vine of great antiquity had grown up, and crept all over it, and concealed the shingles from view. It also covered the slabs, and kept many of them from falling out and hurting someone.

For many years "The Manse" had been the miserable residence of Bailey, the storekeeper; and Bailey always

looked forward to the time when he could afford to build himself a new house and put a fire-stick in the old one. That time came at last—came just when the parson received a call to the district. Then Bailey changed his mind, and formed a new love for the old “caboose.” He became proud of it, and spoke of it as “a comfortable little house,” and thought it was “just the place to suit the minister until the funds of the church increased and a proper manse could be erected for him”; and Bailey, in the interests of the church, made a sacrifice, and placed the old rookery at the disposal of the church committee, of which he himself was one, for the use of the parson at eight shillings a week. And the committee, in their simplicity, appreciated Bailey’s benevolence and rented the humpy from him.

Eight years went by, and nothing ever increased at Springfield, except the poor parson’s family and the rent, which Bailey, to make up for the cost of a few second-hand floor boards, which he had put down one day, raised to nine shillings a week.

Four little children the parson had running about “The Manse” (Raymond, the eldest boy, had won his way to the University, and was away in Sydney), and how he managed to accommodate them all when night came on the Lord only could tell—none of the congregation ever could.

Notwithstanding its age and dilapidated appearance,



IN THE MANSE KITCHEN.

The Poor Parson.

though, "The Manse" was a fine object lesson to the rough inhabitants of the surrounding districts in homeliness; and members of the congregation, and many who were not members, delighted to call and spend an hour or two there whenever business took them to the township. And they were always sure of a kindly welcome from the poor parson and his wife. Many of them, too, called when they had no business at the township; and some of the young girls of the different localities would gather together, and ride ten and fifteen miles to see Mrs. McCulloch, and spend an afternoon with her. And what delight those visits always brought to the poor parson's wife! She would run with open arms to meet the girls at the rickety, hingeless garden gate, greet them by their Christian names, conduct them inside, and give them tea and scones and cakes that she had made herself. She would ask kindly after their parents and brothers and sisters; show them all the peach and apricot and melon jams she had made during the week, and display the "big ironing" she had done, and the dress she was making for herself out of material which only cost her four and sixpence. In a casual way she would draw light-hearted comparisons between the troubles and worries that surrounded her and the days of comfort and luxury she had known when a single girl in the old country, and she would answer their many well-meaning questions, until the girls

knew as much about her birth-place, and family history, and college days as she did herself. And when the afternoon was spent, and it was time to return home, the girls would be sorry and reluctant to take leave of the poor parson's wife. But they always promised to come again the following week.

"Poor Mrs. McCulloch," they would say, when riding along the road, "she must feel it hard, after being brought up so well, and used to the best of everything, to come out here, and be so poor; and have to do all her own work like that, and bring up a big family!"

"Far harder on her than it would be on any of us," they would add, with a sigh, "because we've been reared to it, and never knew anything else."

Ah, yes! they were kind and thoughtful girls, those country girls of Narralane!

Others, too, who didn't belong to his congregation would sometimes call at "The Manse" to see the parson; some to seek assistance or sympathy in their misfortunes and setbacks; some to ask advice in their domestic differences, and some to beg; but none were ever received indifferently or refused a favour by the poor parson of Springfield.

Bill Eaglefoot, a useless sort of "handy man" who existed by doing small jobs in a costly way for farmers who didn't always regard him as a nuisance, called at The Manse

to see the parson late one evening. The poor parson invited Bill inside, and asked him to sit down. But Bill wasn't a man to impose on anyone's hospitality when he was bent on business, and preferred to stand.

"And what service can I render to you?" the parson asked, kindly.

Bill twirled his shabby, old, felt hat round his fingers, and stammered:

"What I come to see you about, sir, is, after all, I s'pect, only what plenty others have come to see you about, and I s'pect lots more will come to see you about, if your life is spared, as I hope it will be, sir, God bless you."

Bill paused for breath, and to give the poor parson a chance to interrogate him. The parson didn't exactly follow the meaning of his guest, and looked wonderingly at him, and waited for him to proceed.

Bill twirled his hat some more, then took courage.

"Well, it's about getting married I've come to see you, sir."

"Aye," the parson said, beginning to understand Bill; "oh—h, that's it," and he smiled benignly on Bill.

"Yes, yes," Bill said, looking very uncomfortable.

"That's very simple," and the poor parson moved to his little writing-table which stood in the corner of the dining room, and rummaged for official forms.



By Smith 07

"IT'S ABOUT GETTING MARRIED I'VE COME TO SEE YOU."
The Poor Parson.

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"Yes," Bill said anxiously, noting the minister's movements; "but I don't want to do it now; *she* ain't here; I haven't her with me, y' know, sir."

"I'll just take a few particulars," the parson replied, with a look of assurance, "and the rest can be fixed up on whatever day you have decided between you for the ceremony."

"Yes, yes," and Bill proceeded to give the parson the information he required about himself and his "intended."

"Lizzie Lake, of Narralane," Bill said, nervously, when the parson asked the girl's name.

"Lake—of Narralane?" the poor parson repeated with a puzzled look on his face.

"Yes, yes," and Bill twirled his hat harder than ever, and shifted restlessly about.

"I never heard the name before," the parson said, "and I thought I was intimate with all at Narralane."

"Oh, *you* wouldn't know her," Bill said; "she's only workin' there same as meself."

"And has she reached her majority?" queried the parson.

Bill was perplexed.

"Is she under or over twenty-one?"

"She must be," from Bill.

"But under or over?"

Bill reflected. Then replied:

“Oh, over it a long way; she must be forty if she’s a day.”

The parson smiled, and placed the form in a drawer.

“Well, if your party can make it convenient to be present here on Wednesday, at, say, four o’clock in the afternoon, I’ll be ready with everything then.” And he rose and shook hands with Bill at the door.

“Ah, yes,” Bill murmured, hesitating and twirling the hat.

“And I hope it will be a joyful and a happy union,” the parson added, for Bill’s benefit.

“Oh, yes,” from Bill again. Then there was an awkward silence.

After awhile.

“Well, I don’t like askin’ it,” Bill broke out, “’pon me word, I don’t, but could you lend me a few shillings, sir, just to take me back to Narralane to-night, and I could bring it to you on Wednesday; that is, if you don’t mind?”

The poor parson promptly turned and consulted his wife.

“We’ve two half-crowns in the purse, Donald,” Mrs. McCulloch said, “if that will be sufficient.”

“Oh, any amount,” Bill said, answering for the parson—“any amount.”

And when the parson handed him the money Bill's heart was touched with gratitude. He bowed his head low, and said:

"Thank yer, sir, thank yer, and God bless yer, as I know He will."

Then Bill put his hat on, and departed.

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Wednesday afternoon. The little dining room at "The Manse" had been put in order, and for several hours the parson had been patiently waiting and watching for the wedding party to come along.

"He surely couldn't have misunderstood me, and mistaken the day," the parson said wonderingly to his wife.

"That could scarcely be, for I heard him myself say Wednesday plainly, Donald," his wife answered. "But has it not occurred to your mind at all that he mightn't have been sincere?"

"It would not be fair to impute ill motive to him, Jean," the parson replied, shaking his head. "So many unforeseen circumstances might have interfered with his plans since he left; and maybe someone may fetch a message in the night."

Eight o'clock struck, and neither party nor message had arrived—and weren't likely to. Bill Eaglefoot, at that

hour, was contentedly husking corn in McClure's barn at Narralane, and entertaining the young McClures with glowing accounts of his inglorious experience among the shearing sheds out west, and of his dealings with horse thieves.

"Very strange—very strange," the parson murmured when ten o'clock struck, and it was time to go to bed.



CHAPTER VI.

McClure Deals with Eaglefoot.

CHURCH SUNDAY. On his way to conduct service at Narralane, the poor parson, as was his custom, called in at "Loch Ness," McClure's place, to procure a fresh horse, and leave his own old stager in the paddock till he returned again. McClure, in his Sunday suit, and Bill Eaglefoot, in his Monday one, emerged from the barn together as the poor parson drove into the yard.

"My God!" Bill said, when his eyes met the parson's, and suddenly retreated to the recesses of the barn, and poked himself out of sight behind some bales of chaff.

"Here," Duncan shouted, on missing Bill, "where's that lazy beggar gane to?"

One of the children standing by located Bill, and informed the parent.

Duncan put his head in at the barn door, and shouted:

"What the deil are ye daein' in there? Are yer sins weighin' sae heavy wi' ye that yer afraid o' the minister? Tak' th' horse oot of th' sulky for him, and put auld Nancy in it."

Bill groaned assent and Duncan, in company with the parson, strode steadily off to the house, where, Duncan said, “a cup o’ tea and a bit o’ a snaek were waitin’.”

Before going inside the parson paused, and in low confidential tones questioned Duncan about Bill.

“Oh, he’s just a useless sort o’ an auld beggar,” Duncan answered. “He’s doin’ a bit o’ huskin’ for me for his grub and a few shullins a week; and when he’s finished maybe he’ll gang awa’ and booze it a’ up.”

Then the parson told Duncan all about Bill’s visit to “The Manse.”

“By the Laws!” Duncan cried, losing his temper, “d’ye tell me he lee’d sae awfu’ to you—a meenster o’ the Gospel, and robb-ed you o’ twa half-croons? Hang his ragged soul!”

“Hush, McClure, hush!” the poor parson said, holding up a finger to check Duncan; “you must not fly into wrath about it, man; it’s not right.”

“I canna’ help mesel’, pairrson,” Duncan fumed, his big broad chest heaving with righteous indignation.

“I canna help mesel’ callin’ him a——”

“Hush, hush!” And the poor parson held up both hands to silence Duncan.

“And he deceived you, and telt y’ he was gaun tae

mairry sic a thing as Lizzie Lake, yon auld black gin i' the yaird there—th' low, dirty——”

“Hush, man! You mustn't be so angry.” And again the parson arrested Duncan's language in the nick of time.

“Go you inside then,” Duncan said, “and hae y'r tea, pairrson, and, be the powers, I'll gang an' bring the auld dog down here be his lang lug, sae I will, and gie him sic a talkin to as 'll mak' him wish he wer hanged to the limb o' a tree before he thocht o' committin' perjury and thievin' frae a meenister o' the gospel.”

And Duncan, as good as his word, went off, and returned, leading the trembling, guilty-looking Bill by the ear.

“Stan' y' there!” he foamed, shoving the terror-stricken reprobate into a corner of the room.

“Stan' ye there, y' auld sinner, and confront you th' meenister.”

“Whatever is the matter, Duncan?” his wife anxiously asked, coming from her room, and looking from one to the other.

“This son o' auld Nick went a' th' way to Springfield, and telt th' meenister he was goin' to be mairrit to auld black Luzzie, and extraakit twa half-croons frae him.”

“I *did*, I *did*, Mrs. McClure, my God I did,” Bill broke out, pathetically. “And I ask his reverence's forgiveness for it, I do, I do!”

“Well, y’ll no get any forgiveness.” And, turning to his eldest son, who appeared on the scene with a half-wondering smile, Duncan fairly shouted, “Go you, Peter, and fetch that black skin o’ a Luzzy here, and, b’ the powers, I’ll mak’ him keep his word wi’ her and tak’ her fer his wife this vera meenit.”

“Don’t be sae foolish, Duncan,” his wife cried. “Hae some sense, man.”

“I’m nae foolish, Vi,” Duncan shouted indignantly. “He’s conviekit himself o’ crime.”

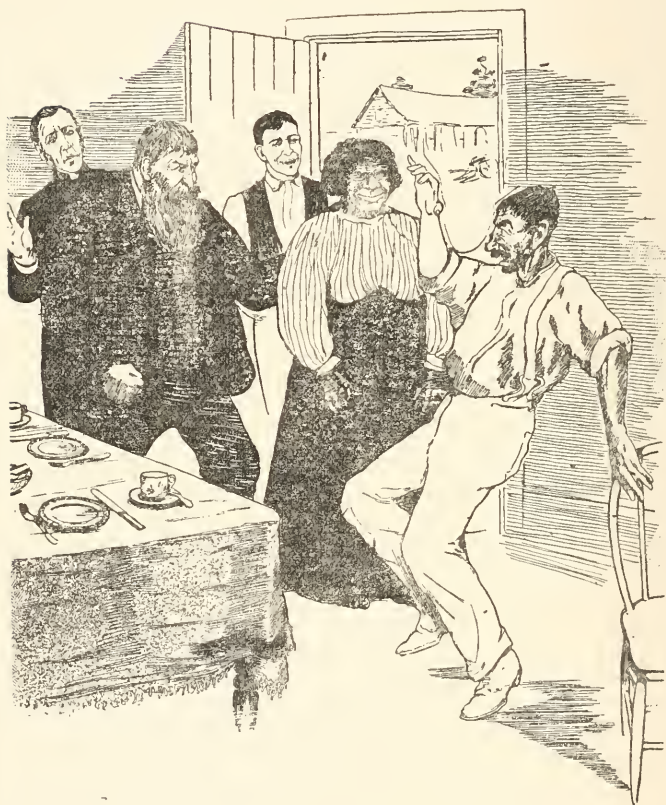
“You must not do these things, McClure,” the parson said, sternly. “You must not bear malice. He has confessed to his wickedness, and asked forgiveness.”

“He’ll get nae forgiveness, pairrson,” Duncan yelled, flying further off the handle. “He’ll get nae redemption frae me.”

Peter, with the old black gin in tow, entered the room. Lizzie grinned and grunted at everyone present, and rolled her white eyes about like a pair of billiard balls.

“Stan’ ye there, and be mairried to this son o’ the deil,” said Duncan, pushing the hideous, but pleased-looking aboriginal washerwoman close beside Bill.

“No, no, not *her*,” Bill pleaded, “not her, my God, not her,” and he slipped down in a limp, helpless heap on the floor.



"NO, NO; NOT HER," BILL PLEADED.

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“Are ye goin’ mad, Duncan, or whatever is ’t come over ye, man?” Mrs. McClure cried, seizing her husband by the arm, and shaking him.

Then the parson, with determined countenance, confronted Duncan, and, raising both hands, said, impressively:

“As an elder of the kirk, you must not insist on such an infamous and unchristian transaction. ’Tis greater sin than all he has committed himself; and I cannot tolerate it more. Calm yourself, McClure; be sensible, and send these people about their business—if they have any.”

Duncan became sensible, and, after a while, calmed down, and allowed Bill and Lizzie to depart in peace.

Five minutes later. Duncan, from behind a broad, good-natured smile, looked across the room at his wife, as the poor parson finished his tea, and said:

“Be the powers, Vi, didna auld Bill get a deil o’ a frieht; did y’ see hoo his bloomin’ auld knees rattled themselves together when Peter fetched Lizzie in?”



CHAPTER VII.

Eaglefoot's Religion.

WHEN the parson had finished his "cup o' tea and a bit o' a snack," as Duncan McClure called it, and was ready to drive to the church, Duncan, slowly buttoning his roomy tweed coat over his great chest, stood at the back door of the house, and roared at the top of his voice to the unhappy Bill:

"Look shairp there, you lazy auld deil," he said, "and bring the da——"

"DUNCAN!" Mrs. McClure cried, warningly.

"Bring the MEENISTER'S trap," Duncan said correcting himself, "roon to the front o' the hoose, and fetch the buggy roon' for mysel'."

Then Duncan, with a broad smile on his face, turned to the minister, and said apologetically:

"I can never think o' onythin' but 'pairrson' when I want to speak about you, Mr. McCulloch."

The parson smiled his forgiveness.

"And a curious thing," Duncan went on, as though he had just made the discovery, "my auld faither was just the

same as me; he'd always say 'pairrson,' and I suppose it wud be frae hearin' him say 't when I was a youngster that I got into the habit."

Mrs. McClure doubted whether the habit was as strong in the "auld man" as in Duncan.

"Oh, my word, Vi," Duncan answered, his blue eyes lighting up with enthusiasm, "I don't think I could be nearly so bad as the auld governor. He was an awfu' beggar, you ken. D'ye mind the day when Pairrson McLeod was preachin' at our plaice, and the governor, he couldna' hear him—he was deaf as the deil, ye ken—and he got up in a terrible tear in the middle o' the sermon, and says to auld Tom Roberts—'Dang him, Tom, he canna' preach at a'.' "

"DUNCAN," Mrs. McClure called in horror, "ye forget yoursel', man!"

But just then Bill Eaglefoot appeared at the front door with the minister's trap, and attracted Duncan's attention.

"Hae y' got it, Bill?" Duncan called out, and wobbled off to inspect the turnout, and to see if Bill had harnessed the animal safely.

Bill had.

"She's a' richt, pairrson," Duncan said; "ye can get in noo and be aff, and we'll be alang at y'r heels."

And Duncan strode round to where the big double-

seated buggy that was to convey himself and family to the church was standing.

Before getting into the trap the parson paused, and spoke a few kindly words of advice to Bill, and referred feelingly to the incident of his perfidy, and, in a friendly, unoffending way, inquired what his religion was, and if he ever went to church.

“Same as yours, I think, sir; that is, when I used to go reg’ly,” Bill answered.

“An’ ye’re a Presbyterian, then?” the parson replied, with a look of delight in his eye.

Bill hesitated. Bill was not a confident liar.

“Well, yes—that’s what you call it, I suppose,” he answered; “but it’s so long since I’ve been there, now, sir—always knockin’ round the bush, you know—I’ve never had a chance to keep it up.” And Bill in a restless way moved round the trap to escape further interrogation.

But the parson’s interest in Bill was only intensified.

“What part of Scotland do you come from?” he asked, looking over the mare’s back at Bill.

Bill looked puzzled. Bill didn’t know a great deal about geography, and suddenly became interested in a portion of the harness.

“Was it from Glasgow?”

“Yairs, that’s the place,” Bill said, with assumed in-

difference, and stepped back a pace or two, and eyed the wheels of the trap.

“And what was the name of the church you went to there?”

Bill said, “Eh?”

The parson repeated the question.

“Oh, I was only a youngster then, you know,” Bill answered, shaking the wheel of the trap with all his strength to see if there was any danger of it coming off.

For a moment or two the parson studied Bill in silence, then said:

“There’s room in the trap with me if you have a mind to come to the service this afternoon.” And he looked closely and kindly at the bush reprobate.

“Oh, I couldn’t go there in these sort o’ clothes, sir,” Bill replied, looking down at the legs of his greasy, ragged moles.

“It makes no difference what kind of clothes you come to the house of the Lord in,” the parson assured him, encouragingly.

Bill’s eyes brightened.

“Well, I couldn’t go in any case, sir, to-day,” he answered; “’cause now, when I come to think o’ it, the boss wants me to look after the cows, and have them in, ready for milking when he gets back. But some other Sunday,

sir, when I get a few decent things (looking down at his unsightly pants again), I'll go; upon my word I will, sir."

McClure, with Mrs. McClure beside him in the buggy, and all the young McClures packed behind, came cautiously round the corner of the house, and drew up at the front door.

"Hoot! Have ye no' got a start yet, pairrson?" he said, when he saw the minister in conversation with Bill.

The minister approached the wheel of McClure's buggy.

"Your man," meaning Bill, "tells me he belongs to our kirk."

"Out o' that! Out o' that! Heigh! Hoo!" Bill suddenly broke out, and rushed away in pretence of preventing a cow that was standing some fifty yards or more from the lucerne paddock from breaking into it.

"She's daein' nae hairm," McClure shouted at Bill; "let her alane." But Bill didn't hear his master's voice.

Then, turning to the minister, McClure said:

"I beg your pardon, pairrson."

The parson repeated what Bill had told him about his religion, and asked Duncan if he couldn't arrange the milking so as "the man could attend service."

Duncan opened his eyes and mouth, and stared in dismay at his wife.

"D'ye hear that, Vi?" he gasped. "Was ther' ever

sic a leear?" Then, looking at the minister. "Why, he's been tellin' us a' every nicht sin' he's bin here, pairrson, that he was born at the goldfields, and was Church o' England. Roast his hide! A Seotehman!" (Duncan turned his eyes in the direction of the skulking Bill, and lifted his voice that he might hear.) "There's nae loafin, lyin' deils like *him* in Scotland, and if he were a Presbyterian, pairrson, it would be a guid thing for the kirk to gi'e him a bait. Git up in your trap, man, and pay nae heed tae him."

Mrs. McClure and the children smiled at Duncan, and the parson climbed into his sulky, and drove on.

They arrived at the church half an hour before the time for commencing service, and the minister went inside, while Duncan, in his customary way, moved among the little crowd collected in the shade of the building, and joeosely asked them about their "sins."

"There was a grreat row at my place the-day," he said, planting his hands in the pockets of his broad Sunday trousers, and standing up square before the amused-looking audience with his head well back and his broad chest expanded to the full.

"Ye ken auld Bill Eaglefoot?" (They all did, and grinned and ehuckled at the thoughts of him.) "Well, the auld deil went up to Springfield the ither day, and tellt the pairrson he was gaun tae get mairrit to black Luzzie

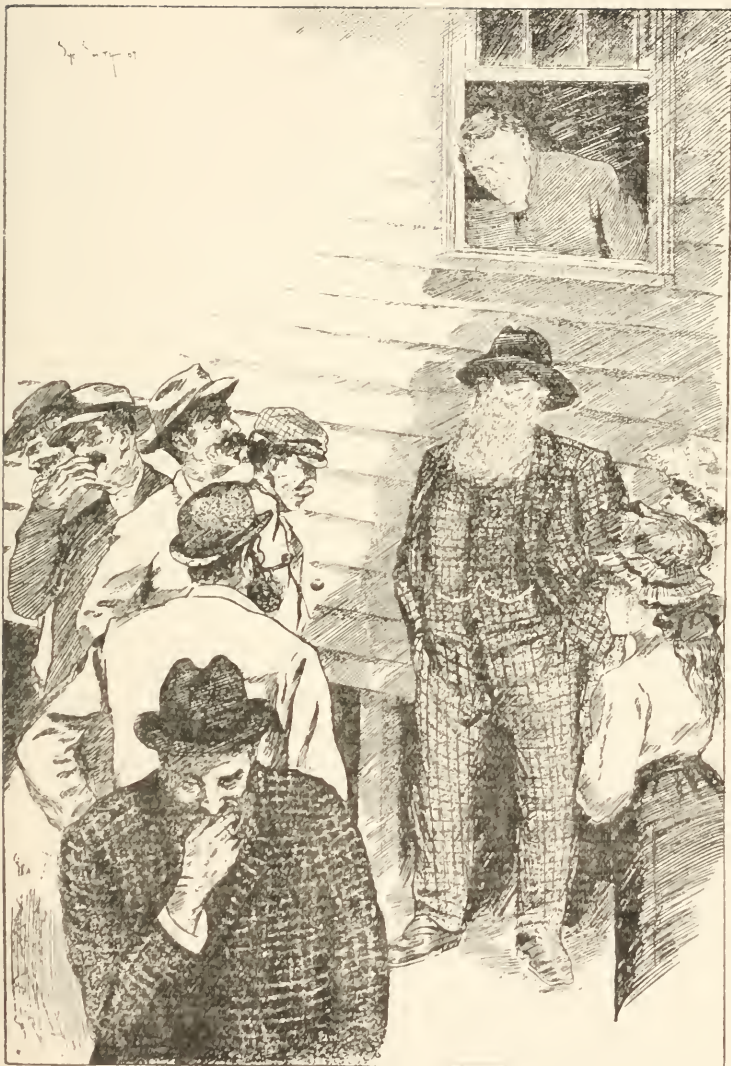
at ma place, and borrowed five bob frae him on the strength o't, and went and had the deil's ain spree."

The silent, solemn-looking crowd burst into loud hilarity and some of them yelled, "Great Scott!" And Duncan, before proceeding further, peeped up cautiously at the window in the side of the church, to see if the parson was looking out.

"An' the-day," he resumed, "when the auld boy" (glancing up at the window again) "cam' to my place, and saw Bill at the barn, he kent him at once, and tellt me a' about it. 'By the wars!' I says, getting real angry, y' ken, 'I'll mak' him pay for his perfidy, pairrson,' and up I walked to the barn whaur Bill was hiding hisel', and I took him by his lang lug, and led him doon to the hoose, whaur the pairrson was haein' a snack."

There was another roar of merriment, and some of the women who had been waiting at the front door of the church came, with smiles on their faces, to share the fun.

"'Gang an' fetch that black imp, Lizzie, in here,' I yells at Peter," Duncan went on, gazing seriously on his amused-looking listeners; "and Peter brings Lizzie in. 'Stan' there, ye black sweep,' I says to her, 'and get mairrit to this son o' th' deil,' and, by the holy, didna auld Bill tremble, and he went doon on his knees and begged o' me



"MISTER MCCLURE," CAME STERNLY FROM THE WINDOW.

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not to. And the pairrson, he got in a deuce o' a tear, and my wife she yells at me to ken if I'd gone rratty.

“ ‘Take you his haun,’ I shouts to Lizzie,” he continued, forgetting to look up at the window, at which the parson’s face now appeared, with a look of amazement on it; “and she grabbed his fist, and smiled at him just the way a rale bride would.”

More loud laughter.

“ ‘I canna’ do sic a thing, McClure,’ the parson said; ‘I canna.’ ”

Great laughter.

“I’d like to have been there,” Sam Thomson cried, throwing himself on the grass.

Here Duncan was interrupted.

“*Mister McClure*,” came sternly and solemnly from the window a few feet above the heads of the amused crowd.

They all lifted their eyes and looked up quickly, then dropped them again and turned their backs and grinned at McClure in suppressed merriment.

Duncan, without moving a muscle of his face, looked up calmly at the minister, then taking out his large, old-fashioned watch, and consulting it, said:

“By th’ Hokey, it’s time to get in, chaps,” and, wobbling off, reverently led the way into the service.

CHAPTER VIII.

Bailey's Generosity.

THE parson, in the course of his sermon, said he was very sorry to have to refer again to one or two matters which gave him pain, and reminded his congregation that the church dues and pew rents, and other items, had again fallen into arrears, and the debt on the church, instead of diminishing, was rapidly increasing.

And when the service was over a good many of the congregation, with long faces, consulted together at the fence. They said they had given more than anyone else to the church, and reckoned no minister had a right to talk from the pulpit the way he had done.

Bailey, the storekeeper, said he was getting disgusted with the whole business.

“I come to church,” he added, waving his hands about, “to hear a sermon, not to hear a man talking about debts and making personal remarks about things his congregation should do. There’s no man has done more than I have, but unless there’s a new minister appointed pretty soon, take it from me, I’m done with it altogether.”

And the discontented ones mounted their horses, and climbed into their traps, and went off without saying good-bye to the poor parson.

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A glorious afternoon at Springfield. The distant wheat-fields lay all round like gigantic carpets of living green; roses bloomed in the crudely palinged-in gardens, and filled the air with their fragrance, and the thick vine that covered the Manse was a gorgeous blaze of yellow bloom. In a small horse paddock adjacent to the Manse the parson's children, armed with green bushes, were romping noisily in pursuit of the butterflies which came fluttering along in twos and threes, in dozens and in droves. Inside the Manse, the poor parson, with one elbow on the table and his chin resting in the palm of his hand, sat in gloomy contemplation. His wife sat opposite him staring vacantly at a bundle of letters and bills that lay open before them. For a good while neither of them spoke.

"I'm sure I don't know, John, what we are going to do," Mrs. McCulloch said gloomily. "The doctor's bill can't be met out of our small stipend; even if it were paid regularly, it barely suffices to keep us now."

"It breaks my very heart to owe money, Jean; and it's a great sin, in the eyes of the Lord, for a minister to be in debt at all," the poor parson moaned. "But the congre-

gation will not do their duty." And he rested his head on the table, and for the moment gave way to despondency.

"Don't grieve about it, John," Mrs. McCulloch said, wiping the tears from her eyes, and swallowing a lump that rose to her throat. "Don't grieve, dear. We'll get over it somehow; the piano is a good one—it's surely worth forty pounds, and, though I'll be sorry to part with it, it can go to the sale to-morrow."

"You're a brave woman, Jean," the parson said, lifting his head and raising his eyes to his wife's, "and I know I should not give way, for it's losing faith in the Almighty—indeed, I should not."

"We must bear it all with a good heart, John," his wife concluded, rising from the table; and, taking her seat at the piano, which she hadn't opened for several months, ran her fingers skilfully over the keyboard.

The minister rose, and went and stood by her side.

"Play 'Thy Will be Done,' " he said, and Mrs. McCulloch started to play, and had just finished the hymn when a footstep on the verandah attracted their attention. It was Mrs. Bailey, wife of the storekeeper, come to pay them a visit. Mrs. McCulloch rose, and received the visitor kindly, and the poor parson inquired after Mr. Bailey and the rest of the family, and hoped they were all well.

"I was just playing for my husband," Mrs. McCulloch

said, noticing Mrs. Bailey's eyes roaming inquisitively over the open piano.

"Yes, I heeard you when I was coming in," Mrs. Bailey said, "and it sounded lovely." All music sounded "lovely" to Mrs. Bailey.

"The piano has a beautiful tone," Mrs. McCulloch said, casting an affectionate look at the instrument, "but I'm sorry to say that matters are faring so hard with us now that we must send it to the sale."

"Must you really?" Mrs. Bailey said, in tones of feigned surprise, "and how much will you be asking for it, Mrs. McCulloch?"

"Well, it cost sixty guineas at home," Mrs. McCulloch answered, "and it has hardly ever had any use. If we get half the sum for it, I suppose we will be fortunate."

Mrs. Bailey, who was always on the look out for bargains, said they were thinking of buying a piano for their daughter, and looked with covetous eyes on the instrument, and promised to speak to Mr. Bailey about it when she went home.

"It's a good piano," Mrs. McCulloch said sorrowfully, "and thirty pounds would be very little indeed for it."

.

Next morning. Bailey turned up at the manse before

breakfast was off the table, and asked Mrs. McCulloch to let him see the piano.

Bailey scarcely knew a piano from a case of pint pots, but he examined it closely, and sounded it, and stubbornly condemned it in several places.

"It's all very fine," he said, when Mrs. McCulloch praised the instrument, "but these things if they're not properly fitted sometimes fall to pieces, don't they?"

Then he offered her twenty pounds for it.

Mrs. McCulloch shook her head sadly.

"Well," Bailey said, moving to the door, "you can take or leave it. . . . There's no one else here will give you that much for it, I'm sure of that."

Mrs. McCulloch looked interrogatively at the poor parson; but the parson remained silent.

"All right," she murmured, "take it," and large tears came into her eyes.

"I think you're sensible," Bailey said; "and I'll send you the money and the dray for it on Saturday." And, with a triumphant smile on his face, he turned and hurried away.

Next day. The poor parson was at Loeh Ness having tea with Duncan and Mrs. McClure.

"That mustna be," Duncan said, referring to the sale of the piano. "It mustna be sacrificed in that way. I'll



“AND YOU PROFESS TO BE A CHRISTIAN.”

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gie ye forty pounds for it mysel', pairrson, and bring ye the money on Saturday morn.'" And with a pleased look on his face, and with his heart full of hope, the poor parson went home to his wife at Springfield.

Saturday morning, Bailey arrived at the Manse with several of his men and a dray, and said he had come for the piano.

The poor parson, with Mrs. McCulloch standing anxiously by his side, informed Bailey of Duncan McClure's offer, and asked him if he would agree, for their sake, to cancel the purchase.

"Cancel it!" Bailey said in surprise. "Do you call that honourable? And you profess to be a Christian! Why, that's a mean, shabby sort of thing to do—to try and sell a thing behind my back that I bought from you, and you a minister! Here's the money" (throwing a cheque on the table); "I want the piano."

"If you take that view of it, of course we can't help it," the poor parson moaned.

"I should think not," Bailey answered, and, calling his men in, lifted the piano out, and hurriedly placed it in his dray.

"Bailey's nae guid, an' may auld Nick himsel' mak him his elder and gie him a roastin'," Duncan McClure said warmly when he heard that the piano was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

A Casual Visit.

BOXING DAY; and talk about heat! It *was* heat! The ground was steaming with it; all around the air quivered and glistened; herbage and trees, and cornfield after cornfield, drooped, languished and seemed dead. The inhabitants of Sandy Crossing, as the poor parson passed slowly by on his way home from a sick bed at the Fork Tree, lounged lifelessly on their verandahs—the men with their hats and boots off, their shirts open wide at the chest—and stared out at him, and wondered if “white puggeries hanging down the back were really any good for the sun!”

At McCanty’s selection, where usually there was never a sign of activity, or even civilisation, and where nought but a sorry, tumble-down old homestead supported by an empty pig-sty, a deserted cowyard, a weather-beaten haystack not much higher than an ant bed, a few acres of cultivation containing numerous dead trees and stumps, were to be seen—peals of laughter and excitement suddenly prevailed. A crowd of people was there, and men, women,

and children, regardless of the excessive heat of the day, romped round, pursuing each other from the house to the haystack, and from the haystack back to the house. The parson stared as he approached; then, seeing Duncan McClure striding leisurely about amongst them with his hands in his pockets, smiled amusedly, and called out "Good-day" to him.

"Be th' war!" Duncan exclaimed, turning to old McCanty, "here's oor pairrson."

Old McCanty looked surprised. So did those who were romping about. One by one they stood and stared, and their spirits seemed to go down, as though the presence of a clergyman were a wet blanket to them.

"Come in and join us, pairrson," Duncan said, without consulting his host's feelings on the matter, "an' hae a bit o' a spell."

"Yes, yes—come along in," McCanty added, with a shake of his bald head. "Hang your horse up to that stick, and have a rest."

The parson said he couldn't remain very long, as he had yet to visit Mrs. Daley, who was seriously ill. Then he dismounted, and when he had hitched his horse to the "bit of a stick," McCanty explained the cause of all the joy and commotion.

"Me two sons, Jim and Tom," he said, "have just

returned from the shearin', after being two year away, and they're holdin' a bit of a party in honour of it."

The poor parson smiled in approval, and, along with McClure, followed McCanty inside, where Mrs. McClure and a number of other matrons were being entertained by Mrs. McCanty.

"And as the old woman here can tell you," McCanty went on, introducing the parson to his wife, "they don't often have enough money when they come home to give parties."

"Oh, the boys are all right," Mrs. McCanty snapped, in defence of her progeny. "If they didn't spend their money themselves, I know someone who *would* if he got his hand on it." And she smiled meaningly at everyone in the room.

The parson looked down at his feet, and seemed uncomfortable. But McClure, who understood the McCantys, said good-humouredly:

"Y' don't mean to say that Tom would booze it a' if he got haud o't, Mrs. McCanty?"

Mrs. McCanty chuckled satirically, and, turning her head to the open door, called out:

"Jim and Tom! . . . Come in till I introduce you to the gentleman."

Jim and Tom were standing at the back door, where

they were being lionised by Mary McEvoy, and Katie McCarthy, and Nell Nathan, and a host of other girls, who tittered and giggled at the prospects of Jim and Tom being introduced to a real, live clergyman.

“What sort of a bloke is he?” Jim inquired, in a low tone. “Does he belong to the union?” And the girls tittered louder.

Then Jim peered cautiously round the door, and, catching a glimpse of the parson’s dark trousers, declared him to be a “black leg,” at which the girls shrieked senselessly.

“Jim and Tom!” Mrs. McCanty called again, this time in a firm voice.

And Jim said, looking at the girls:

“I s’pose we better keep sweet with him—case we might want him one of these days,” and, shoving Tom into the lead, stumbled in, both with flash, lout-like grins on their faces.

“This is Jim, and this is Tom,” Mrs. McCanty said, pointing them out in order of age to the parson. The parson rose and shook hands with them, and asked them if they were quite well.

Jim ducked his head, and said he was “pretty middlin’,” and Tom confessed to “having had ‘Barcoo rot’ a year ago, and being cronk for munce after.”

Then the parson engaged them in conversation about

the shearing trouble out West, and, while they gave him their views on the strike, McCanty and Duncan worked up a private conversation together in the farthest corner of the room.

“Does he take any?” McCanty, with one eye on the parson, whispered into Duncan’s woolly ear.

“Never touches at a’,” Duncan whispered back; “he’s stric’ teetotal, and doesna encourage even.”

McCanty looked troubled, and began to think hard.

After a long silence, he pinched McClure on the elbow, then rose and said to the company:

“If you don’t mind us for a moment, I want to show Duncan a new wire-strainer I have,” and he marched out the front door. Duncan, after looking round, and with a lot of doubt in his mind, followed his host.

“It’s over here at the stack,” McCanty said, reaching his hand out slyly, and removing a pint-pot from the water-cask and slipping it under his coat as he passed by.

“It’s naethin’ much to see a bloomin’ wire-strainer, Tom,” Duncan said, innocently.

“It isn’t, then; it isn’t,” McCanty answered, when they were hidden from view, “but *this* is worth seein, though, McClure!” And, with a cheerful chuckle, he produced a whisky bottle and the pint-pot from beneath the folds of his Sunday coat.

Duncan stared, and said in protest :

“I hardly ever tak’ grog, man. My wife——”

“Here, man, here!” And McCanty, peering cautiously over the top of the stack to see that no eyes were upon them, shoved the bottle and the pint-pot into Duncan’s big hand.

“Oh, beggar it,” Duncan drawled, reluctantly helping himself, “I’d sooner ye had gien it t’ me in th’ hoose, man; it maks me feel jist like a convieted thief.”

“Down wi’ it, man,” McCanty said, eagerly taking the bottle from Duncan’s hand.

“Weel, then, guid luck t’ ye, McCanty,” Duncan said, raising the pint-pot to his lips, “an’ may that auld bald heid of yours hae loads o’ hair on it afore ye kiek th’ bucket.”

“Good luck,” McCanty answered. And as Duncan held the pint-pot to his head, his four-year-old son, pursued by several other juveniles, rushed round the haystack.

“Out o’ this,” McCanty said to them savagely, and when they vanished he poured himself out a “nip,” and drank to Duncan’s health.

“Good luck,” Duncan responded; then added :

“That laddie o’ mine has the deil’s ain tongue, McCanty,” with a look of apprehension, “and he’ll maybe go in and tell them a’ about us.”



“WEEL, THEN, GUID LUCK T’ YE.”

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And Duncan was a good prophet. The boy bounded in, and before the whole company shouted:

“Maw, maw! Faither is behint th’ haystack wi’ his heid back drinkin’ oot o’ a bottle. I seed him, maw!”

Mrs. McClure turned crimson; the parson pretended he didn’t hear the boy, and the others, after restraining their feelings a while, burst out laughing.

“So was Mr. McCanty, maw,” the boy added, for general information, and made more merriment.

The mirth had hardly subsided when McCanty and Duncan sauntered in, both with innocent expressions on their faces.

“It wasn’t a bad strainer, did you think?” McCanty said, naively, as they took their seats.

“No, it *wasn’t*,” Mrs. McCanty replied; “not for straining whisky out of a bottle.”

“Who’s been straining whisky out of a bottle?” McCanty asked with warmth.

“*You*,” his wife foamed.

“You’re a liar, then, Ellen,” McCanty yelled.

“You canna say that, man,” Duncan roared, jumping to his feet; “you canna say that——”

“I can say what I like in my own house, and won’t consult *you*,” McCanty yelled at Duncan.

“You canna,” Duncan persisted hotly.

"*I can!*" said McCanty.

"Here, you brute," said Mrs. McCanty, losing her temper, as she flew right at her husband's throat. McCanty knocked her down. Duncan McClure knocked McCanty down. The women screamed and brought confusion. The poor parson lifted both his hands, and, raising his voice, implored peace.

McCanty recovered himself, and seizing a chair, was murderously brandishing it over the head of McClure, when one of the girls, who had taken a message from a man who came galloping along the road, rushed in, and said:

"Mr. McCulloch, Mrs. Daley is dead."

"Dead!" the poor parson exclaimed, lowering his hands; "God have mercy."

"Deid! She canna!" McClure said, lowering his head.

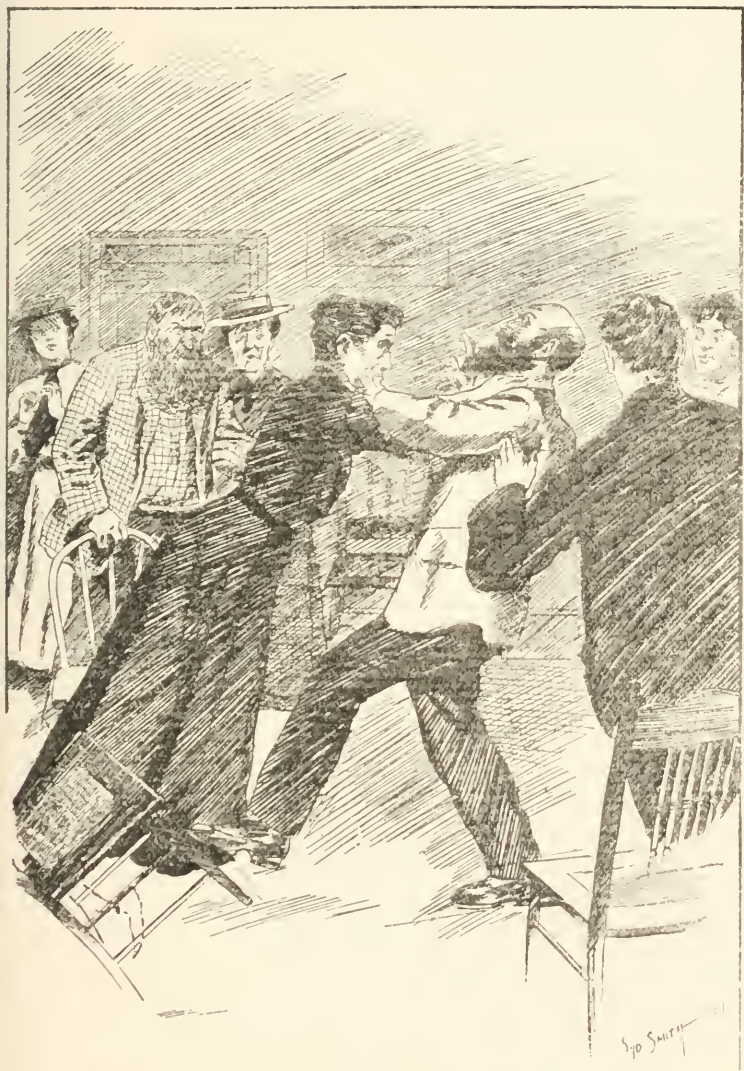
"Mrs. Daley dead!" McCanty muttered, looking nervously round, and putting down the chair.

"Died an hour ago," the girl added slowly.

Then the poor parson raised his head again, and in tender tones said:

"Let us unite in prayer."

And, while the messenger turned and galloped away, they bowed their heads and prayed.



MRS. McCANTY FLEW RIGHT AT HER HUSBAND'S THROAT.

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CHAPTER X.

A Jealous Husband.

IT was just seven months since the whole country side round Narralane had almost danced their legs off at Archie MacLennan's wedding. And such a wedding! Such dancing! Such dust! And how they feasted on the stuffed fowl, and congratulated Archie on securing Hannah Hornby for his wife, and Hannah on securing Archie for her husband.

The rejoicing lasted two days; then Archie put Hannah on a horse and took her "home"—took her to the Fifteen Mile Hut, a lonely, lifeless-looking, slab dwelling leaning beside the farthest boundary fence of Yaramba Station run, and there set her down. And what a miserable, melancholy-looking home it was to set anyone down in. A sheep-yard made of gigantic logs rolled one upon the other; a small sapling horse-yard into which no horse with any sense would ever walk without being led or shoved, and a few sheepskins hanging on the fence, were the only signs of civilisation that surrounded it. The rest was all gum-trees—gum-trees—scaly, scraggy, useless-looking, Australian gum-trees.

Archie MacLennan was a paddock-mender, and, for repairing the fences of a station paddock that took nearly the whole day to ride round, and keeping an eye on the stock it contained, he received fifteen shillings a week, and a single ration, and occasionally a kind word from the boss. And Archie felt proud of the position and its emoluments.

“’Tisn’t everyone who has a steady job,” he used to say, “and there’s nothing like it these times.” And Hannah would agree with Archie, and talk hopefully of the future, and proceed to figure out what their wealth would amount to in twenty years if they could only manage to save a certain sum every year. Hannah was a woman full of great possibilities, and Archie began to look on her as a small savings bank erected on his own premises. And Archie would take Hannah in his arms, and hug her, and ask her if she would always be as fond of him? And Hannah would embrace Archie, and tell him that all her love and thoughts were for him, and would be his until death.

When the honeymoon was all over, Archie settled down, and went to work methodically. Every morning he would saddle his horse at the door of the hut, then stuff some lunch that Hannah had cut for him into the saddle pouch, and, telling her “not to be lonely or afraid,” would whistle the dog, and ride off through the forest of miserable gum-trees.

And when Archie had disappeared through the timber, big tears would come into Hannah's eyes, and straightway she would begin to feel lonely and nervous. What little housework she had to do wouldn't occupy her more than a couple of hours, and when it was got through, she would fret and mope about, moving aimlessly from one room to the other (there were only two rooms in the hut altogether). At intervals she would sit and think of home and mother and her little brother, and, burying her face in her apron, would sob and sob. Then by way of change she would pull herself together, and talk to herself encouragingly, and say, "What a blessed old fool I am."

As the day went on, Hannah's thoughts would run on travellers. Hannah always distrusted travellers. And, if a poor, harmless old wretch, labouring beneath the burden of a heavy swag, happened along, she would fly inside, fasten the doors and windows of the old hut, and crouch under the bed, and hold her breath until he had gone past.

One day old Jimmy Belcher, whom everybody but Hannah knew to be a harmless old "sundowner," hove in sight with a swag on his back and a billy-can in his hand. Hannah hurried in from the verandah, secured the doors and windows, and, settling herself in a heap under the bed, breathlessly waited for the closing of the gate to tell her the man had passed through and was gone. But old Jimmy

was not one of those who would pass a door in a cold, unsociable way. Jimmy had a lot of homely instincts about him. Besides, he was nearly always tired and thirsty when he came to a house. He was tired and thirsty *now*. He went to the tank, and, putting his mouth under the tap, drank long and extravagantly. Then he put his swag down, and groaned and curled himself up comfortably on the verandah like a big dog.

Hannah's heart beat violently.

Jimmy struck at the flies, and started talking to himself.

Hannah clutched at her heart, and strained her ears to catch what Jimmy was saying.

For a long while Jimmy was silent, then suddenly he moved, and Hannah heard him say, "Blast y', I'll kill y'." Poor Hannah! She tried to scream, but her voice failed her. Then she broke out into rolling lumps of perspiration, and breathed faster than ever! But Jimmy didn't proceed to kill her. He didn't even speak again. He went to sleep. Hannah remained cooped up under the bed, perspiring and breathing hard, for three hours. She was seized with cramps, too, in the neck, and in the back, and in all her limbs. At last the tramp of a horse approaching the hut fell on her ears. Then a voice familiar to her asked:

"Isn't Mrs. MacLennan inside?"

It was the voice of the poor parson. Hannah's heart jumped, and she suddenly found her voice.

"Mr. McCulloch! Save me! Save me!" she screamed, rolling out into the middle of the floor.

The poor parson received the fright of his life.

"What is the matter in there, man?" he demanded of the alarmed-looking sundowner.

But Jimmy only sat up, and, with wide-open eyes, listened with alarm to the unexpected cries coming from within.

"I thought it wer' empty," he murmured, gathering himself together.

The parson sprang to the door, and rattled it, and called out for it to be opened.

Jimmy picked up his swag, and made off hurriedly.

"Help me! Help me!" came from Hannah.

The parson burst the door open, and found Hannah on her knees, with a wild, hysterical glare in her eyes.

"What is the matter, Mrs. MacLennan?" he asked excitedly, lifting her to her feet.

"Oh-h! Oh-h!" Hannah moaned. "I'm glad you are here. I'm glad! I'm glad!—There's a man—a man—been outside all day trying to get in to—to—kill me. Oh-h!"

"What! that man?" And the parson rushed out to

the verandah, with anger in his mild eye. But Jimmy was nearly out of sight. Then the parson paused, and thought hard, and remembering the man was asleep on the verandah when he himself rode up, turned and questioned Hannah closely. But Hannah was all a-tremble, and threw up her arms hysterically, and looked like falling to the floor. The parson seized her in his arms, and held her up.

“Calm yourself, Mrs. MacLennan,” he pleaded, supporting her on his shoulder.

“Oh-h! he tried to kill me!” And Hannah clutched the poor parson tightly round the neck, and broke into a long chain of broken sobs.

Just then Archie returned whistling. He rode up to the hut, and, dismounting, stepped lightly on to the verandah, and appeared at the door.

“Hold me! Hold me!” Hannah was moaning, and the poor parson, with a troubled look in his face, was wondering what he would do with his burden, when Archie, in a weak, broken voice, said:

“Good evenin’!”

At the sound of the voice the poor parson started, and looked quickly over his shoulder; but, on seeing it was only Archie, a pleased look came into his face.

“Oh, Archie! Have you come?” Hannah murmured, feebly, releasing her hold of the parson’s shoulder.



Looking at

THE POOR PARSON STARTED.

The Poor Parson.

“Yes, I’ve come,” Archie answered in a changed voice, stepping inside and staring at them with fire in his eye, “and, by gums, I think I’ll soon be going.”

The poor parson stared hard at Archie, and changed colour; then looked deeply offended.

“Mr. MacLennan,” he said, proceeding in a wounded tone to explain the fright Hannah had received.

“She didn’t seem to be very frightened o’ you a while ago, anyway,” Archie sneered, jealousy and rage surging in his eye.

“Archie, darling,” Hannah burst out, realising the position, “what do you mean? Oh-h! how could you? Listen to me, Archie, listen to me,” and she advanced to put her arms round her husband’s neck.

Archie threw up his hands, angrily, and warned her off.

“If that’s the way you give all your love and thoughts to me,” he sneered, “I’ve had enough, by the wars, I have!”

“Mr. MacLennan,” the poor parson pleaded pathetically, “before the Lord, what I am going to tell you is gospel truth. Will you be reasonable, and, like a man, hear me for a moment?”

Archie, after demurring for some time, heard him doggedly.

“Do you believe me now?” the parson, with a look of confidence, asked, when he had given his account of the in-

eident. Archie looked at Hannah, then at the parson, and said, sullenly :

“Well, I’m blowed if I know.”

“Well, all I can say is, that you’re neither a Christian husband nor a good man, Mr. MacLennan,” and the poor parson turned, and left the house.

“Don’t let him go like that,” Hannah squealed; “if you do I’ll kill myself,” and she snatched the butcher’s knife from the table, and brandished it suicidally. “I’ll take my life, I will.”

Archie was in a tight place.

“Well, on your word, then, was he only holding you up, and not kissing you, when I came in?” And Archie’s voice came thick and husky, and his eyes filled with tears.

“Do you doubt my word?” and Hannah turned the point of the knife to her agitated bosom.

“For God’s sake, then, Hannah,” Archie broke out in a loud sob, “give me a kiss, and say no more about it.”

Hannah gladly gave him a kiss—gave him several kisses, and playfully called him a “silly old sausage.” For a moment Archie held Hannah from him at arm’s length, and smiled into her face. Then he thought of the parson, and ran out to call him back. But the parson had gone.

CHAPTER XI.

A Chapter of Accidents.

A BRIGHT, clear day in the middle of summer. And such a summer! With the coming of spring rain had fallen at regular intervals, until the broad, billowy plains of the Darling Downs were a sight that no inhabitant had ever dreamed of living to see—till the grass, the corn, the wheat, and the full lagoons and flowing creeks, were the pride and talk of the land.

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The poor parson assisted his wife and children into the sulky, then, seating himself beside them, started off to visit the distant members of his scattered congregation.

“I think we’ll drive straight to Narralane, Jean,” he said, taking the reins in his hand and giving them a shake to urge the old horse into the collar, “and put up at Duncan McClure’s place to-night, for there’s sure to be a good welcome awaiting us there.”

Mrs. McCulloch assented cheerfully.

“It’s always a pleasure to stay with the McClures, John,” she said; “they’re so different to other folk, and

they always seem so glad to have us. And I like Mr. McClure. He has such an honest, homely way with him, and he's so cheerful and quaint with it all. And you may think ill of me, John, when I say it, but I can never help smiling at him—even when you're offering prayers—for he looks at you in such a droll way."

"But you shouldn't, Jean," the parson murmured in gentle reproval, "you shouldn't."

"But often I cannot help myself, John," Mrs. McCulloch went on, "but I'm afraid we'll not meet with so hearty a welcome at all the places we're going to." And she mentioned the names of several members of the congregation whose sincerity she doubted.

"But it is not right we should judge them, Jean," the parson answered meekly, "for, after all, may it not be only their manner—just the way they have been moulded, so to speak, Jean?"

"It might, John, but do you not think that the hand of the potter shook just a little when they were being moulded?" And Mrs. McCulloch smiled playfully at her husband.

The parson stared steadily across the great green plain, but made no reply.

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The heat of the day had passed. The sun was slowly

sinking, and as the poor parson's rickety trap, wobbling and creaking beneath its load, approached McClure's farm a scene of rare activity presented itself. The steam thrasher, new to the district, was hard at work; brawny, sunburnt men, with their sleeves rolled up and veils to protect their eyes from the dust and flies falling round their faces, were working as though the very fate of the world depended upon the supremacy of sinew over steam. Some were heaving sheaves from the stacks; some forking away the straw; some sowing the mouths of bags and lifting them into position; others raking the chaff away, and all the while the engine and machinery buzzed and hummed, and sent up a thick cloud of dust and smoke into the air. In the thick of it all, sometimes lifting bags, sometimes raking chaff away, more often using the packing needle, and with more chaff and dust in his whiskers and hair and on his hat and flannel shirt than were on any three of the others, was Dunean McClure himself. And, pottering actively round the tank from which the engine drew its supply of water, doing nothing in a most emphatic way, was Bill Eaglefoot.

The poor parson drew up within a short distance of the scene, and allowed his wife and family to witness the engine at work.

Bill, who had more time than any of the others for

looking about, caught sight of the trap, and shouted his discovery to McClure. But Bill's voice was completely lost in the midst of all the noise, and failed to carry. He excitedly left his post, and, wading knee-deep through chaff and straw, essayed to reach Duncan, who was working on his knees at the other end of the plant. Before he could reach Duncan's side, however, Bill had to pass a running fire of heavy sheaves that came flying from the top of the stack right off the points of Tom Brady's and Willie Wiley's pitchforks.

"Half a moment," Bill shouted, lustily, hesitating and looking up at Brady; "I want to get by to speak to the Boss."

Brady grinned, and, aiming a sheaf right at Bill, hit him in the eye with the bearded end of it and knocked him off his feet. Bill spat out straw and spluttered and used bad language and was trying to regain his feet when a sheaf from Wiley planted itself with a thud in his stomach, and prostrated him some more. Then Brady put on a spurt, and dropped sheaves on top of Bill, and wedged them all round him until nothing of him was visible but the toes of his tattered old boots, which protruded from the end of the sheaves. Brady and Wiley eased off, and started laughing, then waved their forks about, and called out to those below to rescue Bill. Some of the men looked up, and

couldn't understand. Brady placed his hands to his mouth and roared:

"Pull him out!"

Old Hannigan looked up, and, putting his horny hand behind his ear, shouted back:

"Can't hear y'."

"Pull that fool out from under the sheaves!" Wiley yelled, pointing with his pitchfork to locate Bill.

"They've thrown a snake down, and it's under the sheaves," said Tom Anderson, whose sense of hearing was keener than Hannigan's.

"A snake under the sheaves," Dan Fitzgerald repeated, and, brandishing a rake, started cautiously to explore the heap. Anderson and Hannigan joined in the search, and began removing the top of the sheaves tenderly. Bill's toes wriggling in the chaff attracted old Hannigan.

"Look out!" he said, and jumped back. The others jumped back, too. Then Hannigan swung his rake, and rained a succession of short, sharp blows on Bill's toes. Brady, from the stack, aimed a heavy sheaf at old Hannigan, and laid him low.

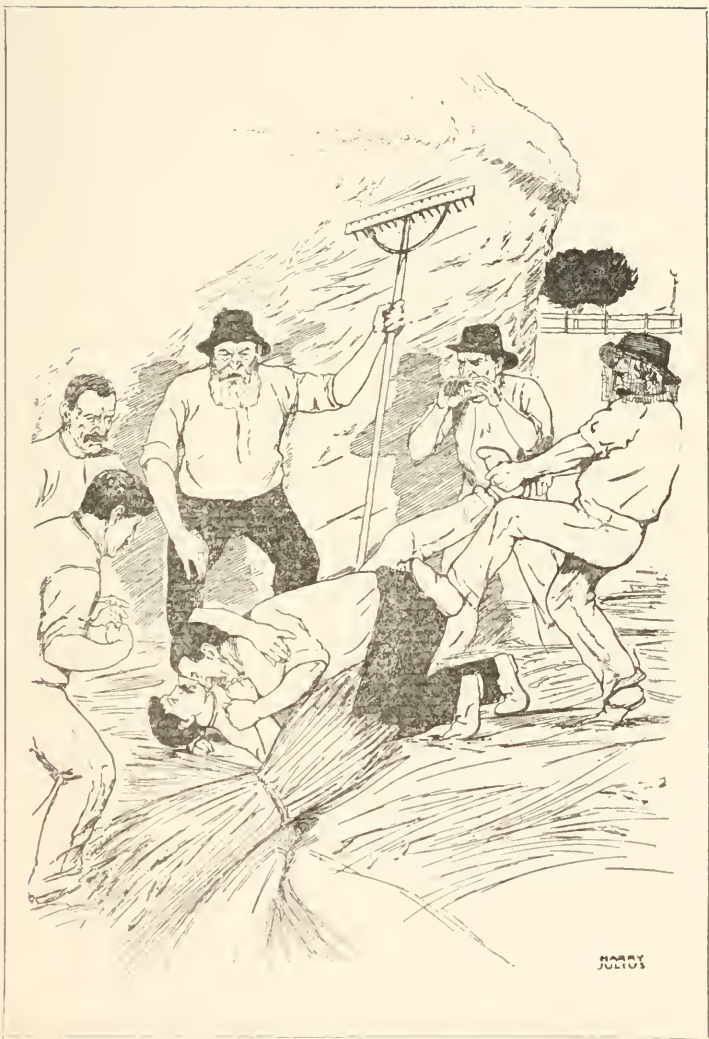
"Hold on there! Hang it!" Tom shouted feelingly, looking up at Brady. Brady aimed one at Tom Anderson, and it struck Dan Fitzgerald behind the knees and cut him down on top of Hannigan.

“You’re a pair of blasted fools!” Dan Fitzgerald yelled murderously, and attracted everyone’s attention. Commotion set in generally then, and the driver stopped the engine.

“What th’ deil’s th’ matter wi’ ye a’?” Duncan cried.

No one seemed able to explain, and all eyes were turned inquiringly to the men on the stack. Wiley, disgusted, felt and fumbled excitedly for the ladder with his foot in order to descend. In his hurry he missed the top rung, and reeled to the bottom like a shot hawk. He fell on a heap of loose straw, and on Dan Fitzgerald’s pitchfork, which lay upside down. The prongs of the fork were forced into the back part of Wiley’s thigh. Wiley bounced up, and, yelling with fright and pain, danced about, trailing the long handle after him. Dan Fitzgerald seized the handle with both hands and separated the fork from Wiley and called him a fool. Wiley, with tears in his eyes, called Dan Fitzgerald a variety of fools, and questioned his nationality and the legitimacy of his birth. Then they fought it out in a most unscientific sort of way amongst the chaff.

“Here, hold that rotten ladder,” Brady shouted out from the top of the stack, exhibiting a determination to descend and vanquish everyone below. No one seemed to hear Brady. They were all gathered round Wiley and Dan Fitzgerald, making vain efforts to separate them. Brady swore at the lot of them in turn, and threatened to throw



HARRY
JULIUS

THEY FOUGHT IT OUT AMONGST THE CHAFF.

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himself on top of them; then he decided to slide down the side of the stack. He felt his way cautiously, feet foremost, his face looking out from the stack, and both hands tightly gripping the straw. Then he let go, and went down the side with a run—went till the prongs of old Hogan's pitchfork, which Hogan had carefully placed against the stack, so as it wouldn't stick in any one, impeded his descent. The yell of surprise and anguish that suddenly came from Brady put an end to the fight.

"My heavens! he's on the fork!" Hogan cried, and the others threw up their hands in horror. Brady's head fell, and dropped on one shoulder; his eyes rolled about like a pair of billiard balls, and his face turned the colour of death. Hogan seized the handle of the pitchfork and pulled it from under Brady, and Brady fell in a limp heap on the ground, and groaned. Then there was more commotion. In the middle of it all, Wiley gained his presence of mind, and, springing towards the heap of sheaves, seized hold of Bill's two feet, and dragged the reprobate into the light.

"There, that's what all the trouble was about," he said, contemptuously.

Bill spat out chaff, and looked dazed. Duncan and the rest could hardly believe their eyes.

"How the deil got you under there, confoond ye?" Duncan said, staring at Bill.



"THERE. THAT'S WHAT ALL THE TROUBLE WAS ABOUT."

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Bill's eyes rested on the form of Brady, who now sat up with his back to the stack, and started rubbing the wounded part of himself.

"It was 'im," Bill said, in injured tones, "with his flashness. I was goin' to tell y' th' clergyman was waiting over there in his trap, and——"

Duncan looked round, and for the first time became aware of the poor parson's presence.

"Too much sky—skylarkin' altogether," Bill added, sulkily, and walked back to the tank.

"Be crikey!" Duncan said, "it's th' auld pairrson and Mrs. McCulloch." Then, turning to the men, "Get on wi' th' threshin', chaps, an' gie ower a' this humbuggin'."

Then the engine started to hum again; Wiley and Brady crawled slowly up the ladder, which Hannigan held in position for them, and Duncan, covered with dust and chaff, strode across and greeted the visitors.

"What was all the trouble? Was there an accident, McClure?" the parson asked, with a look of grave concern on his pale, thoughtful face.

"Oh-h, no," Duncan answered, feigning indifference. "Naething t' speak aboot, pairrson. Ane o' th' chaps was a bit careless, and let his pitchfork stiek into ane o' the men workin' on th' stack, that was a'."

“Indeed!” the parson murmured, opening his grey eyes sympathetically.

“An’ did it stiek into him very far, Mr. McClure?” Mrs. McCulloch asked, with a deep shudder.

“By Joves, then, it did that,” Duncan replied, without thinking, “a deuce o’ a lang distance.”

“Oh, dear!” from Mrs. McCulloch. “An’ was it in a fatal place, Mr. McClure?”

Duncan began to think, and to look like an untruthful witness.

“Oh, no, jist here in the calf o’ the leg,” he said; and, to demonstrate the locality, pulled up the leg of his trousers, and displayed a lot of hairy, dusty skin.

Mrs. McCulloch smiled, and Duncan changed the conversation.

“Drive alang to th’ hoose, pairrrson,” he said, “an’ I’ll send auld Bill doon to tak the horse oot for ye, an’ he can gie him a rub doon an’ a bundle o’ hay.”



CHAPTER XII.

Lizzie Lake's Revenge.

THE parson drove on, and, in a while, was followed by Bill, who limped violently from the effects of the blows Hannigan had dealt him on the instep.

Bill was diffident about approaching the trap, and hung down his head, and, as he came face to face with Mrs. McCulloch, looked like a convicted thief. Bill had not had the pleasure of meeting her since the evening at the manse to make arrangements about his wedding.

The poor parson stepped out from the trap, and, having exchanged greetings with Mrs. McClure and all the young McClures, who had gathered round with bright, beaming faces to welcome their visitors, shook hands with Bill and asked him how he was getting along.

Bill went down and complained bitterly of pains in his feet.

“Is it the poor man who was injured with the pitchfork, John?” Mrs. McCulloch anxiously asked, looking with a sympathetic eye at Bill.

"It was not you, was it?" the poor parson inquired, interrogating the shuffling reprobate.

Bill studiously shook his head, and bent lower, and pressed his feet with both hands.

"No, not 'im!" came contemptuously in a chorus from the young McClures; "it was Tom Brady."

"This is Mr. Eaglefoot," the parson said, politely, addressing his wife in Bill's interests. "He it was who—who—er——"

The parson paused for a word. It was supplied by one of the girls.

"That you lent the half-crowns to, Mrs. McCulloch," she said, with a boisterous laugh, in which everyone but Bill and the parson joined. Bill rarely ever joined in laughs.

For a while Mrs. McCulloch stared at Bill with wonder and surprise in her eye. But Bill didn't let his eyes meet hers. He suddenly straightened up, and said:

"What time will you want the horse in the morning, sir?"

The parson wasn't sure what hour he would require the animal, and started to consider.

"But it doesn't matter, sir," Bill added promptly; "I'll put him in the little paddick for you where he'll be 'andy, sir, and I'll have him ready for you just whenever you want 'im, sir. Is everythink out of the sulky, sir?"

Everything was except Mrs. McCulloch, and when she started to climb down Bill moved round to the other side of the horse, and fumbled with the harness.

“That’s all right, sir,” Bill said to the parson, when Mrs. McClure and the girls had taken charge of Mrs. McCulloch and the children.

“You needn’t wait, sir; I’ll look after everythink, an’ see it’s all right, sir.”

Bill hurriedly turned the horse round to take the trap to the shed, and came into collision with Black Lizzie, who had emerged from the rear of the kitchen to empty a bucket of suds.

“Get out o’ th’ road,” Bill said, in a lordly way. Bill could never stand women poking about, and getting in his way when he had responsible work to do.

“You shutit yer mouth,” Lizzie responded, promptly.

“Yer black snake! I’ll put th’ horse over y’,” Bill hissed.

“Don’t you callit me bad names,” Lizzie answered, scowling angrily. “You been too pflash alergetter! You likeit I marry you once, and stoleit money from Missa Parson.”

“You ugly old heathen!” Bill said, forcing the animal’s head towards the black woman.

“I trowit bucket over y’,” Lizzie shouted, stepping back.

Bill urged the unwilling animal, who displayed more manners than himself, to trample Lizzie underfoot.

Lizzie, suiting the action to the word, heaved the contents of the bucket into the face of both Bill and the horse, and a quantity of the fluid went down Bill’s throat, and made him cough. The horse, quiet and all as it was, suddenly took alarm. It swung on to Bill and knocked him in a heap on the ground, and dragged the cart over him, then trotted off with the reins dangling about its heels.

Lizzie, her white eyes bulging from their sockets, followed up her advantage. She threw the empty bucket at Bill, and rattled it on his head; then she flew savagely at him and kicked him in the ribs with her bare big toe. Bill tried to rise and meet her on fair footing, but Lizzie put both hands to him and shoved him over, then, changing her foot, delivered him a fresh series of place-kicks with the other toe.

Bill rolled about, and bellowed “Murder! Murder!” The next moment the house was emptied, and Mrs. McClure and the parson and the bigger girls all rushed excitedly to the rescue.

Mrs. McClure took charge of the black washerwoman.

“What on earth do you mean, Lizzie?” she asked.



LIZZIE HEAVED THE CONTENTS OF THE BUCKET.

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"He been callit me 'black snake'," Lizzie foamed, with all the wild blood of the black surging in her eye.

"By heavens!" Bill whimpered, sheltering himself behind the form of the parson, "I'll summons her for this."

Bill always had a lot of faith in the justice of the law courts. In this respect he was a singular man.

"You summits me," Lizzie hissed scornfully, "an' you heah mo' about it."

Just then the parson remembered having left his turnout in charge of Bill.

"Where's the horse and sulky?" he asked, looking anxiously up and down the yard.

Bill turned round quickly, and when he saw the horse had passed through the small wicket gate into the calf yard, and had only taken the harness and shafts with him, threw up his hands, and displayed symptoms of insanity, or something.

"*She* did it, sir," he yelled, pointing to black Lizzie, "*she* did it!"

Lizzie defended herself.

"*He* been do it!" she cried; "he been do it himself, Missa Parson; he let yarraman go!"

Mrs. McClure and Mrs. McCulloch and the girls became hysterical, and moaned at sight of the disabled sulky, while

the poor parson, staring rigidly for several seconds, murmured:

“Dear! Dear! Dear!”

Duncan McClure appeared on the scene. He stared with wondering eyes at the broken sulky, then at the sad-looking spectators.

“Wha th’ deil did a’ this?” he said, in a firm tone.

The parson and Mrs. McClure and the girls commenced in the same breath to give Duncan a confused and unintelligible account of the disaster. Duncan only caught the name of Lizzie.

“The black deil,” he broke out, furiously; “I’ll kick her oot o’ th’ place.” And, swinging his arms about, turned, and took a step in the direction of the kitchen. The parson, with uplifted arms, intercepted Duncan.

“Don’t be hasty, McClure,” he said; “it was not, I think, all the woman’s fault.”

“Didn’t we tell you it was old Bill’s?” the eldest girl broke in, wildly. “He let the horse wander.”

“What!” Duncan yelled, jumping round. “An’ whit way did ye no tell me sae at first? Th’ guid fer naething! I’ll twist his scraggy neck!” And he glared all around in search of Eaglefoot.

“I think it was not exactly his fault, either, McClure,” the parson said, wishing to see justice done.



"IT WAS AYE A MIDDLIN' AULD YUN, PAIRISON."

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“I canna’ listen tae a’ these contradeections; someb maun hae dune it,” Duncan yelled angrily. “It’s nae the first time they’ve negleckit my property, an’ I canna’ stan’ it, an’ I *willna’*.” And Duncan swung his arms about more.

“But it’s not your trap, McClure,” the parson said, turning to the damaged sulky.

“No, it’s not ours, paw,” the eldest girl exclaimed cheerfully.

“It’s the meenister’s ain,” Mrs. McClure put in, soothingly.

Duncan’s countenance instantly changed, and he looked towards the house for assurance that the minister’s turn-out was not standing there.

“I really thocht is was my ain,” he said, smiling, and turned and eyed the parson’s broken property for several moments. Then he gazed at the minister, and said:

“But it wasna much guid—it was aye a middlin’ auld yun, pairrson.”



CHAPTER XIII.

Visiting the Congregation.

THE poor parson and his family put in a pleasant night at "Loch Ness." They were waited on hand and foot; given the best rooms and beds in the house, and next morning, in McClure's sulky, they drove out through the big gate to continue their "round."

"Ye'll be carefu', pairrson," Duncan, thinking of his property, called out as he closed the gate behind the vehicle, "an' don't let the horse out o' your hands at a'."

The parson assured Duncan he would take every precaution with the borrowed chattel, then, giving the reins a series of tugs, gradually worked the animal into a steady jog, and the sulky rolled away westward.

It was a long, slow, sleepy drive, and all through the day, as the sulky creaked along, a swarm of wretched flies followed, pestering the occupants, and settling thickly on all parts of the horse. Still they dragged along on their weary way—on past the old sheep station, with its deserted yards luxuriant with nettles and horehound; in and out of

the rough, steep, stony crossings; on past the camping ground, where bullock teams were spelling, and drivers drinking rum beneath the drays; past the Leaning Apple Tree, where lay the rude-cut sandstone that marked the resting-place of a murdered pioneer; past the Survey Camp, the Sugar Loaf, and the Horseshoe Bend; then, crossing the long gap, the sulky entered a newly-fenced lane, and Macpherson's green corn and the iron-roofed humpy, sitting almost on the edge of it, burst full in view. The tired children sat up, and stared expectantly—stared as though it were the streets of Canaan they were entering.

“Whose place is it, Maw?” the eldest child asked curiously.

“Mr. Macpherson's,” the mother answered, “but we are not going to wait at it overlong.”

“It hasn't a verandah, Maw,” said another of the offspring, making a discovery.

“Nor a chimbely,” from another, and the young McCullochs displayed an inclination to greet the poor selector's habitation with a display of mirth, but their mother told them “they mustn't.”

Suddenly the dogs barked, and rushed out under the two-rail fence and surrounded the sulky. The poor parson drew up to the slip-rails, and, allowing the old horse to stand opposite the door of the house, waited for some move-

ment on the part of the occupants. For several minutes they waited. Then the parson called out at the top of his voice. A small bare head showed cautiously round one corner of the house, then another, and another. The parson beckoned, and the three heads suddenly disappeared. The parson smiled amusedly at his wife, then steadily watched the corner of the house for the heads to appear again. The heads appeared round the opposite corner, and for quite a long interval remained studying the visitors—remained until Mrs. McCulloch's eyes rested on them; then, like black divers in the water, they vanished again.

“Poor things!” Mrs. McCulloch sighed, “how afraid they seem.”

Next moment there was a loud rustling in the tall corn, and Mrs. Macpherson, followed by her two grown-up daughters, Mary and Ellen, with large white calico bonnets on their heads, and each carrying a reaping hook and a large bundle of green suckers that they had been cutting for the pigs, appeared. They got a great surprise when they saw the sulky standing at the fence, and dropped their bundles.

The parson's tired old horse pricked his lop ears, and feebly whinnied for the discarded fodder.

“It's Mr. and Mrs. McCulloch,” they exclaimed, and the toil-worn, sunburnt women of the selection hurried with beaming faces to the side of the sulky, and, in turn, shook



THE HEADS APPEARED ROUND THE OPPOSITE CORNER.

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hands with everyone in it. The poor parson and his wife were pleased to see them, and inquired kindly after Mr. Macpherson and other members of the Macpherson family.

Mrs. Macpherson was sorry Macpherson was over at Finlay's, giving them a hand with the threshing, and wouldn't be home till the moon was up.

"But Alex," she said, "is down in the potatoes, and will be up in a few minutes."

Then, looking at Mrs. McCulloch and the children, she added, "If I had only known you would be coming this way, I would have had the kettle boiling; but it won't take two minutes if you will come inside, and wait a little while."

The sun was nearly down, however, and the poor parson wished to make Sandy Stewart's place before dark, and Stewart's place was a couple of miles further along.

"Well, you will wait for Alex to come, won't you?" Mrs. Macpherson pleaded, with a motherly consideration for her son.

"He's coming now, I think, mother," Ellen said; "I fancy I can hear him."

The next moment they could all hear him.

"How much longer are you going to be in there?" came angrily from just inside the corn. And, receiving no answer, the voice of Alex yelled:

“Ellen! Ellen! Do y’ think I’m goin’ to break my back carryin’ these dashed things any further? ELLEN!”

Mrs. Macpherson and the two girls went red and became confused.

A huge potato rose suddenly out of the corn, and, swishing through the air, smashed into mash against the end of the house.

“By crikey, I’ll fetch you out o’ that. . . . El-len!”

A second potato swished through the air, and made a big wet spot on the door.

“Alex!” Mrs. Macpherson called out feebly.

“’N why th’ blazes couldn’t some of y’ answer before?” Alex growled, brushing the cornstalks aside, and making his way into the open.

“If she bally well thinks——”

Alex lifted his eyes, and, seeing the parson and his wife in the sulky, suddenly stopped. Then he turned, and rushed back into the corn like a clean skin taking to a scrub, and disappeared. Alex was a sensitive son.

The parson and his wife shook hands with Mrs. Macpherson and her two daughters, and went on their way.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Surprise for the Stewarts.

THE Stewarts had not received word that the poor parson was coming to their place, and the appearance of the sulky at the gate just at dusk gave them a start. All through the afternoon the farm had been thrown into a state of excitement. The men and members of the family were rushing here and there and bustling each other to get their work finished. And there was a lot of work to finish at Stewart's; a hundred cows were milked every day; a separator employed; fifty pigs fed and looked after; and reaping machines and chaffcutters to keep going. But now the commotion was all centred about the dwelling. The Stewarts were holding a ball that night, and all were actively engaged doing something to complete the final preparations. Some of the male members of the family were piling wood into a heap in the back yard to make the illuminations with; others were polishing their best boots; the girls, laden with crockery and provender, were all flying in and out of the house putting finishing touches to the supper arrangements.

Minnie, the eldest girl, caught sight of the visitors, and rushed inside, where her mother and sisters were employed decorating the supper table.

“Good heavens!” she gasped, “who do you think’s coming in the gate?”

The others looked up, and stared with wonder in their eyes.

“The blessed parson and all his tribe!”

“No!” the others groaned incredulously.

“Honour bright!” Minnie gasped further; “they’re in the sulky—the whole blessed kit of them.”

“We can’t give them a room here to-night,” Mrs. Stewart murmured, thinking of the invited guests and all the children and babies they would bring along with them. “What on earth are we going to do?”

“Tell them to go to the deuce,” Agnes, the second girl, forgetting herself for the moment, blurted out.

“*Agnes!*” Mrs. Stewart said, reprovingly.

“Well, what did they want coming to-night for, above all nights?” And Agnes screwed up her face, and proceeded with the decorating.

John, the third son, rushed in.

“Wars! Do you know who’s out there?” he cried.

The look on the faces of his mother and sisters told him plainly they did know.

"Yes, bust them!" Agnes said, sharply.

"Agnes! Agnes!" Mrs. Stewart exclaimed, indignantly.

John burst out laughing.

Agnes looked sullen.

"Which of yous," he said, looking at his sisters, "'ll open the ball with old McCulloch?"

"Stop this, for goodness sake, and let us go and meet them," Mrs. Stewart interrupted, earnestly, and, throwing off her apron, led the way out. The three daughters, with John tailing at their heels to cheer them up, followed.

"Hello, Mr. McCulloch!" Mrs. Stewart said, in pleased, surprised tones. "And you've brought Mrs. McCulloch and the children with you. Well, I *am* pleased to see you."

Then the girls, smiling pleasantly, stepped forward and echoed their mother's welcome and showered kisses on Mrs. McCulloch and the children.

"You couldn't have come a better night," they said; "we're going to have a great, big party."

John grinned at his sisters, and proceeded to take charge of the horse and sulky.

CHAPTER XV.

A Word in Season.

COME inside, Mrs. McCulloch," Mrs. Stewart said, "and take your hat off. Come along too, Mr. McCulloch"; and, briskly mounting the steps, she led the way in. Agnes, following closely behind the parson, who removed his hat, and carried it in his hand, communicated her feelings of disappointment to her sisters with a series of head-shakes and facial contortions. The parson turned to her as he reached the threshold of the door, and remarked how hot the day had been, and how dusty the roads were.

"Oh, hasn't it been wretched?" Agnes said, changing her countenance quickly, and speaking effusively. "It's a wonder you came at all, Mr. McCulloch, and *such* a long drive, too."

The parson explained, as he stepped inside and took a seat, that they had only come from McClure's place that day.

"Mr. McClure and Peter and Bessie are to be here to-night," Catherine put in, enthusiastically.

“*McClure is?*” the parson said, in surprised tones, and added, “He never made mention of it.”

“They wouldn’t know about it,” Agnes said, “until one of the men went over this morning, and you would have left before he arrived, perhaps.”

The parson nodded his head in forgiveness of McClure’s sin of omission.

Mr. Stewart, dressed for the night, and with his red whiskers combed, entered the room, and, in a quiet, homely way, welcomed the visitors. And while he engaged the parson in conversation about the “want of rain,” and the corn, and the harvest prospects, and the state of the country generally, which he cheerfully described as “rippin’,” Agnes and her two sisters slipped away to the kitchen to see about getting tea ready.

“May Old Harry take them!” Agnes growled, snatching a fist full of cups and saucers from a shelf, and rattling them recklessly on the kitchen table.

“Oh, it doesn’t matter,” from Catherine; “they’ll have to sit up all night, that’s all; the children can go to bed in John’s room.”

“It’s not that altogether,” Agnes rattled on, “but we were far enough behind as it was, and before we get tea over now, and dressed, everyone will be here on top of us.”

John, with a broad grin on his face, and a pair of polished boots dangling in his hand, looked in at the door.

“Everyone what comes is expected to dance, ain’t they?” he said jeeringly.

Agnes scowled, and was about to say something uncomplimentary, when her mother hurried in from the sitting room, and whispered:

“Leave the table for just a minute, girls, and come along in; the minister wants to have a short prayer before everyone comes.”

John instantly dropped his boots on the floor, and vanished into his room.

“Oh, *mother!*” Catherine said, with open arms, and simultaneously a cup and saucer slipped from Agnes’s hands.

“Dash it! Look at that!” said Agnes.

“AGNES!” Mrs. Stewart hissed, angrily, “you must mind what you are saying.”

“Well, it’s no time for prayers, anyhow,” Agnes snarled; “we’ll never be ready in time at this rate.”

“He won’t keep you a minute,” Mrs. Stewart said, soothingly.

“Well, if he keeps us long, I’ll get up and come right out, so I will,” and Agnes, with bad grace, proceeded to obey her parent.

"Find the big Bible," Mrs. Stewart added, as the girls filed in, "while I go and tell John."

She tripped smartly to her son's room, and knocked at the door.

There was no response; not a sound of any kind came from within.

"John!" she called quietly into the keyhole.

Still no answer.

"Are you there, John? . . . *John*, do you hear?"

Nothing but silence.

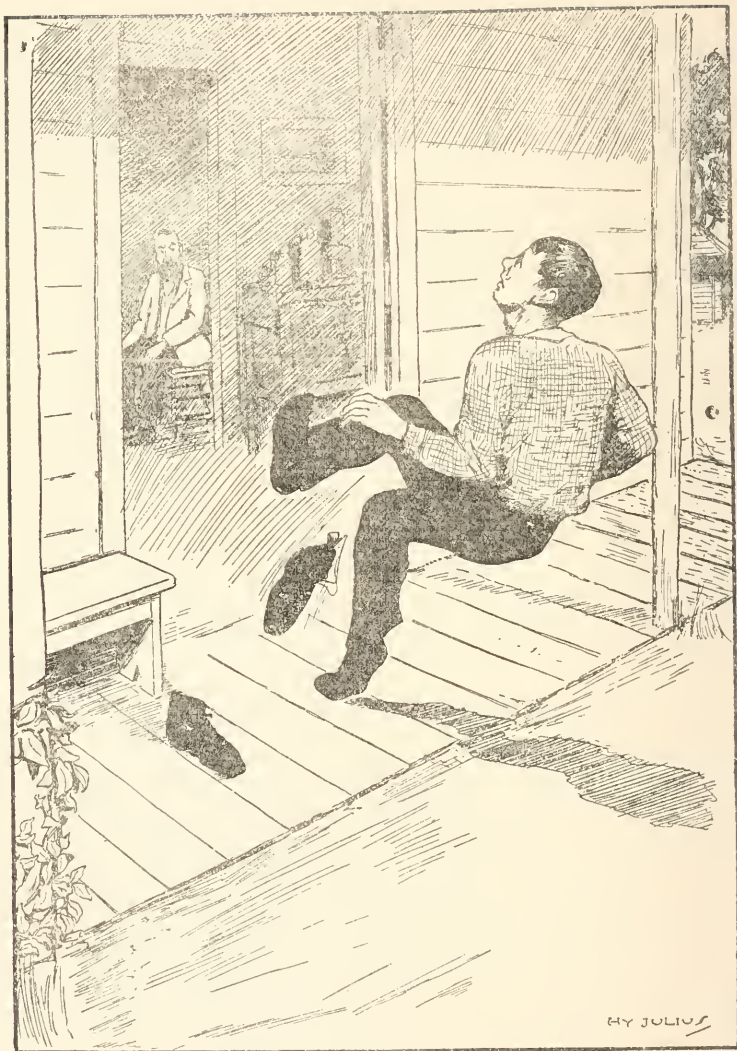
"JOHN!"

But time was slipping away; and Mrs. Stewart turned, and hastened inside.

Then the door of John's room opened cautiously and noiselessly, and John, in his stocking-soles, came out and tip-toed stealthily to where his boots lay at the kitchen door. The kitchen door gaped in full view of the occupants of the front room, and John, to avoid observation, paused, and reached over to secure his property. Stewart's eyes rested on him.

"John!" he bawled, unceremoniously. The surprise threw John off his balance; but, recovering himself with a struggle, he secured one boot, and raced up the yard with it.

Stewart didn't call again. His attention was turned



THE SURPRISE THREW JOHN OFF HIS BALANCE.

The Poor Parson.

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to the female members of his household. They were searching high and low for the Family Bible.

“Everything has been shifted from its proper place to-day,” Mrs. Stewart said, apologetically, to the parson, who sat wiping his spectacles.

The parson nodded good-humouredly, as though he understood.

Stewart’s eyes rested on the volume.

“It’s richt there, top o’ the book case,” he said, and rising and placing his chair in position, mounted it cautiously and reached for the Bible. When his huge hands grasped it, a pack of well-thumbed cards slid off the cover, and went to pieces against his forehead, and flew all over the room, and, for the most part, lay with their evil-looking faces uppermost.

“Guid Lord!” Stewart gasped in astonishment, and, descending the chair, placed the book on the table.

Mrs. Stewart remembered having told Mrs. McCulloch that she didn’t believe in cards at all and turned scarlet and looked from one to another and wished in her heart that the house and the prayer-meeting and the dance that was coming off would all suddenly sink into the earth.

Agnes, with an amused smile on her face, which she contrived to conceal by bending down her head, sprang forward and proceeded to collect the exposure. When she

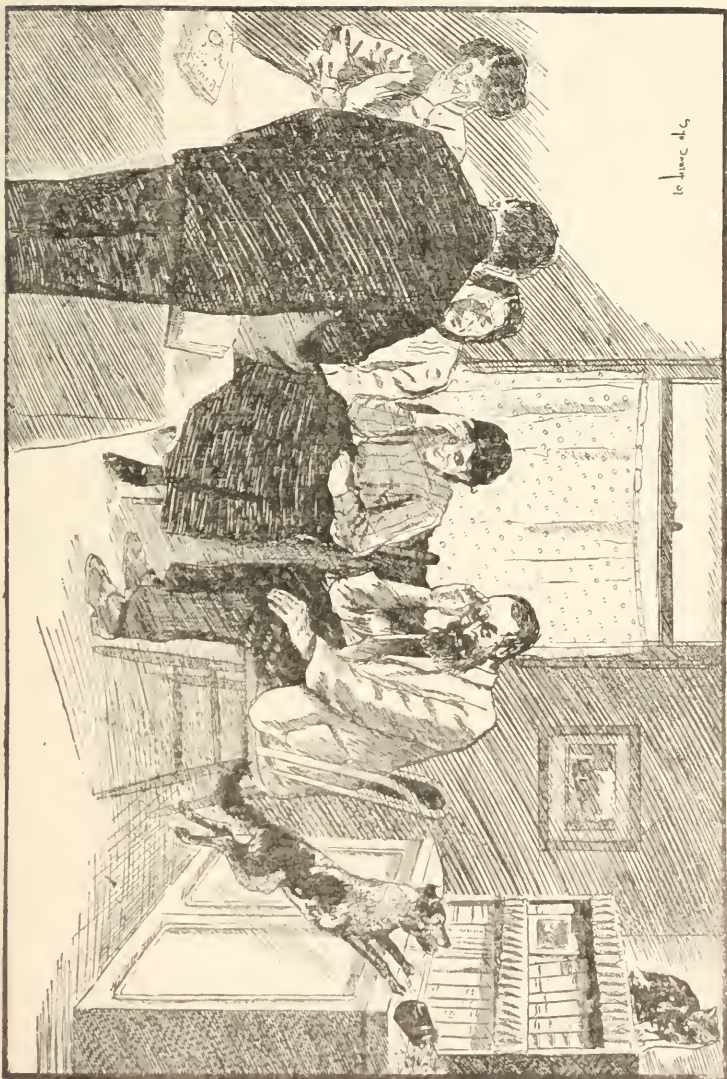
had gathered it up, she paused wondering whether to put the pack away, or throw it out of the window. Stewart seemed to anticipate the latter, and silently took them out of her hand and put them in his coat pocket. Then he sat down heavily in his chair and looked solemnly at Mrs. Stewart.

The minister turned over the leaves of the Bible, and read a passage from the Scriptures; then, while the others reverently bowed their heads, he began to pray. At the end of twenty minutes he was still praying.

John turned noiselessly to the kitchen, and, securing his other boot, threw it at the cat, who was standing on the tea-table gnawing at the leg of a fowl that had been left uncovered. The cat, in its flight, carried some of the crockery off the end of the table with a crash, and, with its back up, raced past Bruiser, the dog, who was standing at the door. Bruiser was suddenly inspired with the spirit of the chase, and, with his teeth bared, pursued the cat. They both rushed headlong into the prayer-meeting. To escape its pursuer the cat flew up on to the book-case; then calmly walked round the edge of it, looking down triumphantly on the disappointed canine.

“Gerroot!” Stewart said, under his breath, and the dog reluctantly retreated to the door, but, finding no further notice taken of his presence, turned and sat down on his

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BRUISER MISUNDERSTOOD AND BARKED SOME MORE.

woolly tail, and barked across the room at the cat. Stewart shook his head, and frowned angrily at the dog. Bruiser misunderstood, and trotted across the room again, and reared his hairy form up along the book-case, and barked some more.

“Con-foond it!” Stewart broke out, and, rising, seized Bruiser by the skin of his neck, and dragged him outside, where he gave him his liberty and a heavy kick in the ribs.

John put his head out of the kitchen.

“Ain’t they finished yet, paw?” he asked, humbly.

“Ah! he’s horribly long,” the parent murmured, and reluctantly returned to see it out.

Another twenty minutes passed; then the parson concluded his prayer.



CHAPTER XVI.

Preparing for Conquest.

WHEN Agnes returned to the kitchen she was very white and couldn't speak. She bounced round, seowling threateningly, and threw things about like a man. But it didn't take long to serve the tea; no one but the parson and his family was hungry; the others were too anxious and excited to eat. And before the girls could clear away the tea things and finish washing-up, the guests began to arrive thickly.

Then there was excitement! Agnes and her two sisters rushed away to "dress"; John stationed himself at the gate leading to the horse yard, and boisterously hailed the new arrivals, and warned them to mind "the stump," and showed them where to put their horses and gear. Stewart took charge of the elderly guests, and introduced them to the parson, while Mrs. Stewart crowded the females into the girls' room, where they rejoiced and hugged each other heartily, and removed their riding habits and hats, and tittivated themselves up—straightened their bows and arranged their hair, while they proudly told each other

whom they were engaged by for the first dance, and lamented having promised to dance with some fool or other in the second one.

“Fancy!” Agnes, with her mouth full of hair pins, mumbled, by way of diversion, as she stood before the looking glass, “the blessed parson and his mob must turn up just as we were going to have tea!”

“What a nuisance!” the others said sympathetically.

“And they’ll all be here the whole jolly night!”

“Oh, why didn’t you send them over to our place?” Miss Braddon said. “They could have had the house all to themselves.”

“I told ma to tell them to go to the deuce,” Agnes answered.

The others all laughed—all but Miss Braddon. She was a very religious girl. She looked shocked, and said:

“Oh, you didn’t, Agnes!”

Agnes turned to Catherine for confirmation, but just then the concertina struck up in the ball-room, and great commotion set in. Some of the girls nearly went off their heads; some of them scampered out; some appealed to others for assistance in adjusting their attire; but none could afford to give any assistance. They were too flurried and in too big a hurry to decorate themselves. Miss Braddon failed to button the back of Mary Brennan’s dress; Ellen

McGee lost her hairpins; Bridget Brown couldn't button one of her new shoes. At the last moment Miss Maynard discovered that Agnes's petticoat was showing below her dress. Agnes said, "Heavens! no, it isn't," and appealed to Miss Braddon. Miss Braddon supported Miss Maynard. Agnes said, "Heavens!" again, and proceeded to undo a lot of herself.

Mrs. Stewart came to the door with Mrs. Finch and her two daughters, and showed them in.

"Hurry up, Agnes," she said, impatiently; "there's such a lot of people waiting to be looked after."

"Dash it, mother," Agnes squealed, "I'm hurrying up all I know."

Bridget Brown, with her shoe in her hand, flopped in a heap on the floor, and laughed hysterically at Agnes. Catherine, in her excitement, turned a bottle of perfume upside down, and the contents went all over Bridget. Bridget suddenly outrivalled Agnes in language, and sprang to her feet, and, shaking her head and clothes about, exclaimed:

"Oh, my heavens, the beastly stuff's all over me!"

Agnes screamed at Bridget; Miss Braddon screamed at Catherine and Bridget; they all screamed at each other. Mrs. Stewart hurried off to meet a contingent of guests who had arrived from the Baek Plains, and were mooning their way up the steps. They were mostly young fellows,

big, bashful, young fellows, who liked to avoid attention or ceremony of any kind, and preferred to stand at the door of the ball-room, and look in until they became used to the surroundings, or till the surroundings became used to them.

Outside, behind the kitchen, quite a crowd of men and boys were gathered round the fire listening to the strains of the concertina, and talking about shooting hares and riding buckjumpers. Suddenly an accordeon struck up, and drowned the notes of the concertina. Tommy Saunders turned his face from the fire, and said in a chuckle-headed sort of way:

“Litthen!”

The others listened.

“There goth Tham Jackthon with hith ’cordyun. He’ll keep their legth movin’.”

“My oath, won’t he?” the others said, in solemn admiration of Sam Jackson, and went on talking about horses and rifles.

The ballroom started to fill up, till all around it stood young girls and lively looking matrons of various ages, all dressed in white muslin, and ornamented profusely with roses and bows of different hues.

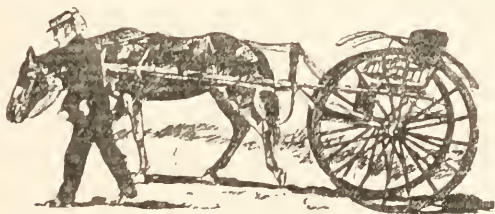
Agnes, followed by Bridget Brown, squeezed through the crush at the door and entered.

“Wars!” Tommy Carter said, “smell th’ scent.”

Bridget blushed; then burst out laughing, and hurried to a seat and hid her face behind a fan.

Just inside Mrs. Stewart's bedroom door, looking into the ball-room, the poor parson and his family, with Stewart, old Mrs. McCreedy, and Granny Baker keeping them company, were accommodated with chairs. Beside them, upon Mrs. Stewart's bed, lay a miscellaneous cargo of hats and a squad of infants kicking their heels up at the ceiling, and goo-gooing contentedly.

At regular intervals numbers of girls, to let Mrs. McCulloch see how they looked in their ball dresses, would file in, and ask her "if she danced!" and the good wife of the poor parson would smile on them, and shake her head in the negative.



CHAPTER XVII.

Stewart's Ball.

CHARLIE BOWERS, with a slip of paper and pencil between his fingers, stepped into the centre of the ball-room, and, glancing at the door opening on to the verandah, where a crowd of eager young men were gathered, said :

“Select yer partners for the first set.”

The crowd of silent-looking men congregated in the doorway shyly entered the ball-room and, tramping across the floor, offered their arms to the partners they had engaged ; then, with their tanned faces beaming with delight, proceeded in irregular order to “promenade.” Those who had not been fortunate enough to secure partners beforehand stalked clumsily from one “wall flower” to another murmuring, “May I have the pleasure?” And if by chance the “clodhopper” of the evening asked a girl who was a capable performer to join him and make an exhibition of herself, she would blush and smile and say, “I don’t think I’ll get up this time, thank you, really.”

Then when a good dancer would come along she would fasten on to his arm eagerly, and hurry into the thick of the fun. And, having asked every available female in the room, the unhappy clodhopper would retire sullenly to the shadow of the door, and regard the lying females, as they frisked round with other fellows, with a suspicious eye.

"Two sets, double tops and bottoms!" the M.C. called out in a voice that commanded a lot of respect. The promenading suddenly ceased then, and a scrimmage set in for the best positions. All those who were certain of the "figures" rushed the "tops" and "bottoms," and those who could only "feel their way through them" fought for "sides."

The M.C. counted heads. "Another couple wanted," he shouted, and his eye roamed round the room in search of someone to fill the gap.

Big Bridget Bailey, sitting silently in a corner with a stiff, stubborn upper lip, was the only possible female.

The eyes of several half-bashful young fellows hovering about the door also roamed round the room. "Here you are," the M.C. called encouragingly to them, "take up Miss Bailey."

The half-bashful young fellows smiled and shrank right out of sight.

Every eye on the floor was turned towards the door.

It seemed to be the only quarter that salvation was expected from.

“Another couple wanted!” the M.C. cried louder than before.

“Come on, Willie,” Miss Merton said coaxingly to her young brother, “and take Miss Bailey up, do.” There was a loud guffaw on the verandah.

“Let the parson take her up,” Willie replied just loud enough to be heard. Then there was a loud laugh inside.

In the middle of the mirth, the “clodhopper,” having recovered his temper, shoved his way in from the verandah, with a broad smile on his face and his chest expanded, and looked hopefully at Bridget. Those on the verandah applauded him.

“Come along, Coulter,” the M.C. said kindly, “Miss Bailey has no partner.”

“Well, here goes,” the clodhopper said bravely, and striding heavily across the floor, bowed and gave his arm to Bridget. Bridget responded like a racehorse, and bounced with him into position.

The little gathering at the door tittered and guffawed some more, and someone remarked that the clodhopper was in for a bad time.

“Dunno,” Saunders, who had abandoned the fire for a few moments, grunted; “she’d have to be bad to be worth



THE CLODHOPPER BOWED AND GAVE HIS ARM TO BRIDGET.

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than 'im. That bloketh th' wortht danther ever wath made."

But the accordeon opened fire again and roared to the strains of "The Quaker's Wife," and all the couples turned and bowed to each other and scraped the floor with their feet; and the M.C. cried, "Half rights and lefts, and ladies' chain," and away they all went with a whirl. Dance! They did dance! They led up, and cantered up, and swung and twirled and galloped, and shouted and collided with each other, to the intense delight of themselves and the amusement of those looking on from the bed-room.

Between times they puffed and panted and sparred for breath.

Then "Hands round" from the M.C., and off they would go again. "Faster," to the musician, who answered like a German band, and while the floor creaked and strained and the house shook, and skirts flew round and fanned the air, a counter commotion suddenly sprang up outside. It sounded like the approach of the French on Waterloo. The crowd that thronged the front door rushed off the verandah, and made their way round to the back of the house to investigate the disturbance. All the dogs about the place, and there must have been fifty or more, started barking. Nearer came the noise. A cheer rent the air outside. Old Stewart rose excitedly from his place in the bed-room.

“The bag-pipes!” he exclaimed, “McClure wi’ his pipes.” The women became excited, and the parson put his head on one side to listen, then smiled complacently. In the wild, shrill strains one could almost hear the words—“The Campbells are coming—hurrah, hurrah,” as the row reached the door. And as the “stockyard” ended, and the dancers, out of breath, retired to their seats, the full force of the wild music burst into the room, followed by the burly form of McClure dressed in kilts, his chin elevated, his cheeks and his eyes and his chest blown out. Talk about a noise! It was a noise!

Around the room McClure marched, the wild cat-like calls mingled with a low, “burring” accompaniment fairly shaking the rafters. Some of the party cheered him; some screamed and put their fingers in their ears; some ran outside; the children on the bed started bag-pipes on their own account, and their mothers ran to them to soothe them, and said, “Sh—dear! Sh—dear—it’s nothing.”

The dogs tried to burrow their way into the room between the legs of the men who were gaping in astonishment at the door, and were zealously kicked back on to the verandah. Horses that were fastened to the fence near the house instead of being turned into the paddock broke their moorings and raced frantically around in the dark, smashing and crashing over every obstacle in the yard. And while all



AROUND THE ROOM MCCLURE MARCHED.

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this went on, Duncan halted in the middle of the floor, and, beating time with the flat of his big boot, suddenly changed the tune to a measure not intelligible to any but old Stewart, and the parson, and their wives. They were Scotch, and understood the subtleties of Scotch music.

And Stewart and the parson, with the light of patriotism in their eyes, rose and smiled out at Duncan. Suddenly the wild, weird music of the pipes ceased, like so many cats dispersed with a brick, and Duncan, by way of apology, burst out, "Blaw it, I've lost a' ma win'!"

Just then the voice of Saunders rang excitedly through the door:

"Every horth out here hath broke away, and they're rathin' over everythin'."

And scarcely were the words out of his mouth when one of the brutes attached to the dray that had brought all the McGrogans to the ball careered past the front steps and carried away one of the verandah posts, and made the whole house tremble. Commotion of a new order set in then. Those who owned horses ran out into the dark to secure their property. Those who didn't own horses, or came with borrowed ones, strolled out calmly to see what was happening. There was a lot of rushing about, and cries of "Whoa!" and "Look out!" filled the air until the affrighted animals were all bailed up in corners and secured

again. Then the rescuers investigated the damage and returned to the ball-room.

“Is that auld moke o’ mine a’ richt, Bill?” Duncan McClure inquired of Bill Brown, who was first to return.

“Oh, he’s there all right,” Bill answered; “but,” looking steadily at the poor parson, “one of the shafts of the minister’s sulky is smashed to pieces.”

“WHAT!” Duncan bawled, and dropped the pipes on the floor.

“Dear, ah, dear,” Mrs. McCulloch murmured, looking sadly at Mrs. Stewart. “The sulky smashed, and it belongs to Mr. McClure!”

The poor parson anxiously consulted Mr. Stewart.

“It’s my ain fau’t—my ain fau’t,” Duncan roared. “I shouldna ha lent it—I shouldna ha lent it!”

“Whaur’s John?” Stewart called, coming from the bed-room. Then, addressing Duncan, “It’s a’ John’s fau’t, no the minister’s, McClure. The lazy yokel must a’ left it i’ the yard. *John*,” he called, again going to the verandah.

Saunders appeared at the door once more in an excited state to convey some fresh intelligence.

“No, it ithn’t the minithter’t’h trap that’t’h broke,” he said; “it’t’h Moore’t’h.”

“What!” Jim Moore said, incredulously.

“*Ours!*” Miss Moore said, and they both turned pale and stared as though their bank had failed.

Duncan McClure stared at Saunders. “An’ it’s no mine at a’, then?” he said, beginning to look cheerful.

“No, it’th Moore’th,” Saunders repeated.

“Gosh me, pairrson,” Duncan said, smiling all over his face, “isna that curious noo? That’s the second time we thoecht that sulky o’ mine was broke to smithereens.”

“Quite true,” he added, turning to those in the ball-room; “that’s twice noo a chap has tellt me it was smashed, and baith times it was some ither body’s,” And, taking up the pipes again, he added, with a smile, “Weel, I’ll play the Quadrille for you noo.”

Then there was more rushing and scrambling for partners, and the dance continued, and joy was unrestrained. And as the night wore on, the poor parson and his wife began to look tired and weary of it all; and their children became peevish and troublesome and whined to go home, and wouldn’t be put to bed by themselves in a strange place for any money.

“The poor people,” Miss Braddon said sympathisingly to Agnes; “what a shame they have to sit up when they are not enjoying themselves,” and suggested that her brother should go and harness the sulky and drive them over to her place, where they could go to bed and sleep comfortably.

Agnes approved of the idea, and Miss Braddon rose and broached it to the poor parson.

“Our place is not more than five miles away,” she said; “it will take Willie no time to drive there. Mother is at home, and there’s plenty of spare beds, and you could all have a good night’s rest.”

The poor parson looked inquiringly at his wife. And Mrs. McCulloch thought, if it wouldn’t be disturbing Mrs. Braddon, and putting her to too much trouble, it would be better than staying at the ball.

“I know mother would be only too pleased,” Miss Braddon said, and went off to hunt up her brother, who, along with others of his age, was on the verandah with a large cup of hot tea and a tart in his hand.

“What!” Willie said. “Go and yoke up and drive them down there this hour of night! What are you giving us?”

The others laughed at Willie’s prospects. “They *have* got a neck,” and Willie scowled.

“You must now, Willie,” his sister said persuasively; “I’ve told them you will.”

Then, turning to one of his companions:

“Herby, you’ll help him to yoke up, won’t you?”

“I’m with him, miss,” Herby said cheerfully; and,

finishing off his tea, added, "Come on," and he hustled Willie down the steps.

Willie went reluctantly, and all the way up the yard, and until the horse was caught and harnessed and the sulky waiting at the door to be occupied, kept murmuring, "Blow them!"



CHAPTER XVIII.

“Till We Meet Again.”

THERE was much fervent handshaking when the poor parson and his family were ready to leave the ball, and a cheerful chorus of voices called out “Good-night” to them from the top of the steps.

“Good-night to you all,” was softly answered back, and in the middle of the night the sulky left Stewart’s place, and creaked and jolted along under low, hanging trees, from the depths of whose gloomy shades the night birds called and hooted dismally. In and out of short, treacherous gullies it rolled; down the sloping banks of dark, dangerous-looking creeks it went, and up the other side of the banks with a rattle and rush—a rush lest the horse might change its mind, as horses sometimes do when half-way up, and run back and make trouble in the bed of the creek.

“Don’t be frightened,” Willie, who was in charge of the reins and straining his practised eyes to take in the lay of the “road,” would say when Mrs. McCulloch, every now and again, nervously clutched his arm.

“Don’t be frightened; I know every inch of this road

like a book,” and, as if to prove Willie unreliable, one of the wheels of the sulky would unexpectedly run over a log, and topple all the occupants but himself out of position.

But Willie would hang out on the high side, to keep the concern from going right over, and say, “It’s orright.”

Willie was endowed with great presence of mind and rare balancing powers; and when the trap would be righted, and the cries of fear had lost themselves in the silence of the gloomy night, he would calmly remark:

“I had forgotten all about that one,” and, belting the horse with the double of the reins to coax him to make up lost time, would proceed to explain to the minister “that it was a log that had been left there by some beggars of timber-getters quite three years ago.” And when, finally, the other wheel located an obstruction on the other side of the road, just to balance matters, Willie chuckled, and said consolingly:

“That’s a little black stump that was always there; and the slip-rails are just here now.” The slip-rails *were* there.

“Whoa!” Willie cried cheerfully, taking a pull on the reins as the animal steadied down. “Here we are,” and the minister and his wife heaved heavy sighs of relief; and, in their hearts, offered a silent prayer to Providence for having guided that sulky along such a road in safety; and in

the fervour of their feelings, they forgot to offer Willie any thing. But Willie didn't mind that; he was not a youth who sought flattery or expected much reward for small service.

"Will we alight?" the minister asked, leaning on the wheel and straining his weak eyes in the dark, to measure the distance to the ground.

"Oh, no! Oh, no! You're orright; stop in!" Willie answered. "We'll drive right through if they're down, and I think they must be." And he leaned forward and peered hard to see if he could locate the rails.

"She's orright," he added; "Git erp!" and flicked the old horse with the reins. The animal hesitated; Willie flicked the reins again, and cried, "Wot are y' fritent of?" and the brute, responding, stepped smoothly over the bottom rail, which was up, without giving any indication of his action, and Willie hit him again. Then there was a sudden stop, also a jolt, and the horse seemed to swerve and swing about in the collar (he was a good horse to pull when he was near anyone's home), and Willie hit him some more, and yelled, "What are you up to?" And the animal grunted, and the sulky started to rise gently towards the sky, and a panic set in.

The upward motion was too unexpected and too unusual even for Willie. He clutched the reins tight and

yelled, “Whoa! Whoa!” and brought the brute to a standstill just when both wheels were nicely balanced on the rail—and the rail was about a foot off the ground.

“Jump out! Jump out!” he commanded, in the general interests of himself and his passengers. And the cries that came from Mrs. McCulloch and the sleepy children woke up the dogs in the yard and started the roosters crowing on the barn before their time.

“Oh! good gracious!—good gracious!—what is happening?” came from the parson, who could see no way of jumping out.

“Steady! Steady!” Willie cried to him; then took a header in the dark himself, and fouled the rail, and fell on his back.

“By the war,” he said, recovering himself and starting to laugh; “do you know what it is?”

“*What? What?*” the poor parson, feeling distractedly for the side of the elevated sulky, answered.

“He’s pulled her right up on top o’ the bottom rail, hanged if he hasn’t.”

Then, going to the horse’s head,

“It’ll be orright, though—I’ll lead him—hang tight, all of y’,” and before the passengers had time to further consider the situation, Willie gave the brute’s head a pull,

and the sulky jumped down off the rail, and bumped the earth heavily, and broke both springs.

Mrs. McCulloch seemed to think they had all fallen down a well, and let out a series of screams, and then shuddered and shivered, and clung on tight to the poor parson for protection. And the poor parson murmured, "Man! Man! be careful for our lives; there's something smashed beneath!"

"Wa-ay!" Willie said to the horse. "*Christmas!*" he added in tones of grave apprehension, realising from the crack that went off what had happened.

Then, after groping and fumbling about the body of the sulky:

"You'd better get out—they're both snapped."

The poor parson didn't wait to hear any more, and he didn't wait to feel for the step with his foot to get down by either. And when Mrs. Mrs. McCulloch and the children were handed out, Willie asked solemnly:

"*Whose* sulky is it?"

"Mr. McClure's," the poor parson answered thoughtfully.

"It's *not* his horse, then," from Willie.

"No; it is my own horse," the minister said humbly; "and I would be better pleased if it were my own sulky."

"It ain't your horse," Willie said confidently; "it's Ted O'Brien's."

"Ted O'Brien's?" from the poor parson in surprised tones. And "Is it not Brownie?" in even more surprised tones from Mrs. McCulloch.

"*This cove?*" Willie answered with a chuckle, and, patting the animal on the neck, "Not much; he's a chestnut. He was the easiest to catch; that's why we put him in. Ted won't miss him, though, till I get back to Stewart's."

"And did you take the beast without the owner's knowledge and consent?" the poor parson asked, with a voice of alarm.

"Oh! Ted won't mind," Willie answered lightly; "he won't know, anyway."

"But that was not honourable, and it is against all laws to do such a thing," the poor parson said reprovingly.

Willie laughed.

"It's not the horse that's the trouble," he put in; "it's the confounded sulky that's worrying me."

"Is the damage very much?" then queried the minister.

"The two springs are gone—but they can be replaced."

"We'll have to give the money to replace them, pa," from Mrs. McCulloch.

"*Replace* them!" Willie exclaimed in outraged sort of tones. "Don't you! Let old Mac do it himself—he can afford to, after the crop he had this year."

Both the minister and his wife smiled in the dark at Willie, but neither made remark.

“Well,” Willie went on, taking the horse by the head again, “I’ll lead him over to the barn, and leave the sulky there; then I’ll show you inside and tell mother you’re here.”

Then, like a band of western nomads, the poor parson and his care, stumbling over every little obstacle in the yard, followed along behind.

“That’ll do now; come on—round this way,” Willie said, leaving the animal at the barn; then, warning them of the presence of a chaffcutter standing in the line of march, and to avoid hitting their heads against the low limb of a willow tree, led the way to the front door, which he opened regardless of noise, and invited them inside.

“Sleep, mother?” he called in a loud voice, shoving in the door of his mother’s bedroom, where a kerosene lamp was dimly burning. “I’ve brought someone for you to find beds for to-night, or for this *mornin’*—someone you know well.”

There was no answer.

“*Hey, mother!*” Willie called at the top of his voice.

Still no answer.

Willie drew close to the bed, then suddenly turned pale as death, and became alarmed.

“*Mother!*” he said in a low, husky voice. Then, turning to the minister and his wife, who were waiting at the

door, “*My heavens!* mother’s *dead*—or something!” and his strong young frame trembled and shook like a gum leaf.

Mrs. McCulloch sprang to the side of the bed, and, throwing her cloak over her shoulders, leaned down, and, speaking softly to the aged form on the bed, took her hand in hers and felt the motion of her pulse.

Turning to the son, she said softly: “Your mother is really bad, but there is yet life; go you for a doctor.”

Turning to her husband: “Poor thing! Her face shows she has been in great pain, too—perhaps taken with cramps.”

The poor parson stooped over and examined the helpless form.

“Oh, God, grant our sister strength, and restore her to the hearts of her children, is all we ask of Thee,” he murmured.

“Come, Willie,” Mrs. McCulloch said to young Bradon, as she removed her hat; “show me where to find the things I’ll want. We must put a fire on to heat a kettle of water; and I’ll need some flannel.”

“The kitchen and everything is out here, Mrs. McCulloch,” Willie said, breaking into a loud sob, and leading the way. “I’ll get some wood——”

“No,” Mrs. McCulloch answered; “just show me where it is, and you go at once for the doctor. I’ll put a fire on

and find whatever I want. On your way, call and tell Jessie, but don't frighten her, Willie. Say mother is not well, and for her to hurry home."

Running back to the bed-room, poor Willie stood at the door for a moment as a last hope, and called "Mother!" but, still receiving no answer, broke into loud sobs, and, turning, hurried away to yard a saddle-horse.

And while Willie was riding hard by the light of the stars to bring the doctor, who was five-and-twenty miles away; and while the poor parson himself took charge of the tired children, and put them snugly to bed, and knelt and prayed that they be kept from temptation, and that the life of the sick woman be spared, and strength speedily restored her; and while Mrs. McCulloch was moving tirelessly in and out from the kitchen to the bed-room, and from the bed-room back to the kitchen, keeping the fire going, and wringing out hot flannels, and applying them to the body of the patient, Miss Braddon, pale, anxious and agitated, hurriedly arrived.

And Ah! it was sad to see her throw herself on her knees beside the bed, and hear her imploring her mother to speak, "to speak one word to Jessie." And when no response—no sign of recognition came—it was more than the heart could hold.

The poor parson, standing by, turned away to hide the tears that filled his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

"Oh, mother! and I was away from you!" Jessie broke out, then rose from her knees, and Mrs. McCulloch took her in her arms, and talked kindly and soothingly to her, and asked her to be brave and to hope for the best.

"Trust in Him, Jessie," she said.

"I know I should," Jessie cried. "But Oh! it's so hard! And to have been away from her when she took sick! I can never forgive myself!" And grief seemed to take possession of the distracted girl.

"Never mind! Never mind!" Mrs. McCulloch was saying kindly, when the poor parson detected a slight movement in the face of the sick woman.

"She wishes to speak, I think," he said quietly, and in a moment the daughter was beside her mother again.

"It's *Jessie*, mother," she cried pitifully. "Your own *Jessie*. Won't you speak to me, mother?"

Again the poor parson turned silently away to hide his emotion.

"Yes, mother?" Jessie cried, placing her cheek close to hers, and eagerly listening to catch any word that might be muttered.

After a painful silence there was a slight movement in the lips of the sick woman, and she murmured faintly,



"IT'S JESSIE, MOTHER."

"Sing—for—me" (another silence), and then, "Sing—
'The—Lord—be—with—you—till—we—meet—again.'"

Jessie rose and burst into tears.

Mrs. McCulloch turned to the poor parson and murmured, "John, she wishes us to sing, 'The Lord be with you till we meet again.'"

The poor parson bowed his head, and said solemnly:

"Lord God, strengthen us that we might lift our voices to Thee, and sing with full and cheerful voice."

Then, with their faces to the dying woman, the minister and his wife stood waiting for Jessie to recover her self-control. With a sob and a struggle she composed herself, and stood beside Mrs. McCulloch. Then together they lifted their voices and sang through the hymn, without falter and with the power and melody of a choir.

When the hymn was concluded, and the sound of their voices died away, the sick woman, whose eyes were partly open, murmured softly, "*Till—we—meet—again.*" Then her eyes closed, and she passed quietly away.

And as the grim grey dawn of another day stole softly in to the humble bush home, and as the failing light of the kerosene lamp paled to a feeble pallid glow, and the birds outside started to chirp and twitter, the frail white hand of the minister rose with an effort above the bowed heads of the two women, and remained silently poised for several

seconds. But his voice broke, and "*Our Heavenly Father . . . Christ Jesus . . . Amen*" was all that was audible of the prayer.

.

There was a rattling of wheels outside, then a cart drew up at the front door, and Duncan McClure, still dressed in his kilts, alighted.

He was met on the verandah by the minister, who broke the news to him.

"Ye dinna tell me that seriously, pairrson?" Duncan said gravely.

The minister nodded solemnly.

"Weel! Weel! Weel!" and McClure shook his head sadly. "That's awfu' . . . That's awfu' . . . An' puir Jessie! I'm sair vexed for Jessie!"

Then Colin Kerr and his mother, and Miss Braydon and her two brothers, and the two McFarlanes and Miss Macpherson, and others who had ridden and driven miles out of their way, when returning home from the ball, appeared in succession to ask how Mrs. Braddon was. And when the minister quietly told them, they, too, almost doubted him for the moment, then their hearts went out in sympathy for Jessie, and in turn they murmured, "Poor Jessie!"

Then, putting their sympathy into practice, many of them remained, and silently and willingly set about helping

to carry out the numerous distressing duties that Death thrusts upon the sorrowing members of a family, when it enters suddenly and darkens the home.

And the sun had not long been up when Willie, in advance of the doctor, his horse coated with flakes of foam, and the hot breath flying from its flaming nostrils like steam from a railway engine, reined up at the door, and sprang from the saddle. His hand firmly gripped a bottle of medicine that protruded from his coat pocket, as he tossed the bridle reins to the ground. Jessie, her eyes red with burning tears, her whole frame atremble, and with Mrs. McCulloch holding her by the arm, came forward to meet him.

"How is mother?" Willie asked, with a hurried, nervous look at his sister.

The awful lump, which checks and chokes the effort of speech in moments of grief, rose in Jessie's throat, and she stared at her brother in silence.

"She's—*gone*, Willie!" Mrs. McCulloch answered softly, and Willie hung his head, and, reeling back against the side of the puffing horse, leaned with his head on his arms against the saddle flap.

After a painful moment or two the poor parson approached him, and, placing his hand on his shoulder, said kindly:

“It is the Lord’s will that your mother should be taken, Willie. She is happy. Don’t give way. Have courage in your trouble, and give strength and support to your sister.”

Willie gulped back a choking sob, and, pulling himself together, lifted his face to the poor parson’s, and said, “I will, Mr. McCulloch.” Then he firmly unsaddled the horse, and turned and joined Jessie.

Over the long and silent funeral that wended its weary way to the little country graveyard in the hollow of the “Apple-tree” flat by the creek, and the sorrowing and sympathy by the open grave when the poor parson in impressive voice pronounced the words “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” let the curtain gently fall.



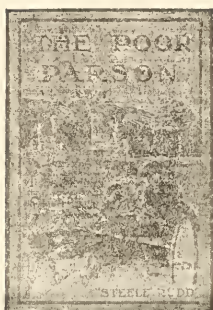
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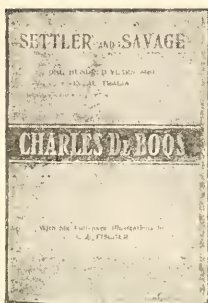
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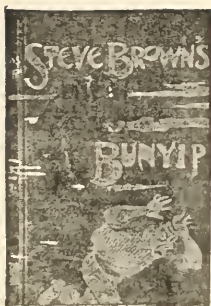
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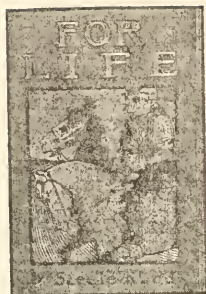
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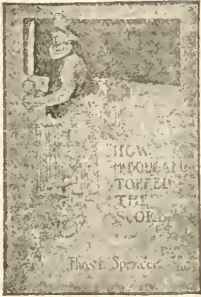
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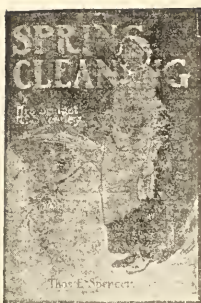
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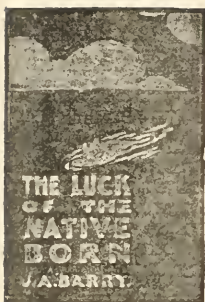
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